

THE TOP OF THE MORNING

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JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

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THE TOP OF THE MORNING



DONNA

THE TOP OF THE MORNING

BY
JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

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"Dr. Ellen" and "Open House"



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The Top of the Morning

CHAPTER I.

CHARLOTTE'S LITTLE BOY.

MRS. McLEAN moved about the flat with the suppressed smile of one who had the best secret in the world in her possession. Good happenings usually set her humming, but to-night's mood was evidently too big for anything but an exultant silence. She even handled the dishes quietly as she placed them on the blue and white table cover that was as regular a feature of Sunday night supper as the salad or the toasted muffins. Whenever she passed a faded photograph of a little boy in knickerbockers, she stopped and studied it, and once she drew her hand caressingly down it, brushing off with serene indifference the little ridge of dust it left on the edge of her palm. When the electric bell in the kitchen rang, she pressed the button that opened the front door, three flights below, then threw

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open her own front door and stood waiting, suppressing her air of good news by a firm rearrangement of her lips, blinking the dreams out of her eyes, shrugging head and shoulders into their everyday angle.

"All five together," she commented as the figures emerged from the lower dimness. "How did that happen?"

"Lorrimer and I got into an argument on the doorstep and forgot to ring the bell," explained the girl who was leading, lifting a vivid, joyous face framed in windblown hair. "When Paul and Lanse came, they naturally joined in. We might have been there yet if Evelyn had not dashed up in her grand motor. That depressed us, someway."

"What was the argument?"

"The advantages of poverty," with a laugh. "I don't care, they are real," she added, throwing back her rain coat. "Paul agrees with me."

"If Donna spoke from any real experience of wealth," began Lorrimer. Mrs. McLean, returning to the dining-room, heard the argument rising again, and, ten minutes later, found them still filling the little hall, Donna, on the one chair, still in the act of taking off

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her overshoes, the three men vigorously interrupting each other, Evelyn, still in her furs, looking on in amused silence.

"Children, come!" she commanded. "I want Donna to toast the muffins," she added as they obeyed, lighting a small gas stove that stood on a table in the corner. The toasting had originally been done in the kitchen, but so many muffins had been ruined through the toast maker's fear of missing something that she had been forced to set up a special Sunday night apparatus in the midst of things.

"Four apiece," announced Donna, beginning to cut her muffins in half somewhat clumsily and at reckless slants. Lorrimer, after watching her unhappily for a moment, sprang up in exasperation.

"For heaven's sake, Donna, let me cut those. You are butchering them!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you know I'm stupid with my hands," she returned, giving him the knife. "We can't all be T. Lorrimer Ffloyds! Charlotte, why don't you make Paul butter them? He never shares in the menial tasks."

Mrs. McLean looked up considerably from her salad making.

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"Ought I, Paul?" she asked of the man beside her.

"Oh, let T. Lorrimer Ffloyd do it; he likes notoriety," was the answer. "Did you know that he cuts out everything he sees printed about himself and *saves* it? He has a cigar box full of remarks about the eminent caricaturist, Lorrimer Ffloyd. He isn't even ashamed of it."

Ffloyd, who was slicing muffins with exquisite precision, smiled behind his glasses.

"Yes; and if I ever see anything about you in print, Paul, I'll cut that out, too," he said. They all laughed, though Donna came at once to the defense.

"It will take more than a cigar box to hold the clippings about Paul, once he gets discovered," she declared hotly.

Mrs. McLean interposed. "You will all be famous in time, so don't scrap about it. Where are the other two?"

"They're in the next room, fighting over the third act," answered Paul. "Lanse wants to hide the leading lady behind a screen, and Evelyn is afraid it has been done before."

Mrs. McLean summoned the reluctant playwrights and began serving things with ab-

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sent minded profuseness. Her laughter was very near the surface to-night, and shone in her eyes, even when she was evidently not listening.

"Charlotte, what is it?" Paul finally asked. "Have you sold a poster or been asked for a frontispiece? What has happened?" The others looked at her in surprise.

"I knew Paul would discover it," she cried; "I was waiting for him. Oh, children, it's the best thing in the world!" Her eyes rested on the photograph. "My boy—my dear little boy—will be home next week."

"O Charlotte! How perfectly beautiful!" There was an excited chorus, and those nearest her took her hands and squeezed them.

"Just think, I haven't seen him for over three years," she went on, tears in her eyes. "His uncle has to give up his pupils and go away for his health, so Cameron is to come back to me—perhaps for good. That dear little man!"

For a while enthusiasm for her sake kept them all jubilant; but gradually, one by one, they grew unwontedly quiet. Floyd pushed back his chair with a frown and began to

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smoke. Donna got up and stared pensively at the shabby old photograph.

"You will have to be awfully good now, Charlotte," she said with a sigh. "You'll have to be a parent day and night, instead of just when you write letters. And Paul will have to expurgate his stories."

"I know," said Charlotte; "we won't be so free. But a son is worth more than that." Paul smiled at her sympathetically.

"*Rather*," he assented.

"What is bothering me," began Ffloyd, "is, can we make him one of Us?" They always said Us with a capital when they were alone together, these six. "Three years in an English family—it's going to be pretty hard to counteract that. Has he imagination, Charlotte?" A troubled look crossed her face.

"How do I know?" she said. "I only know that he is my little boy, and he's coming home."

"And that is quite enough," said Paul quickly. "Let's give him a perfectly rousing welcome." Charlotte's face cleared, and the others brightened.

"We'll cast him for the leading juvenile," said Lanse; "'Little Cameron, son to Mrs.

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McLean, who unconsciously plays the part of Cupid and brings—' ”

“Oh, be still!” commanded Donna. “Will he have the little room, Charlotte? We might fix it up for him. I'll tell you—a dado of caricature rabbits by Lorrimer Ffloyd!” Ffloyd took out his cigar and looked interested.

“That is an idea,” he said. “And you can do some nonsense verses, Donna, and we'll work them in all round—shall we, Charlotte?” Mrs. McLean was radiant.

“It would be the dearest thing in the world!” she exclaimed.

“When do you expect him?” asked Paul.

“A week from Wednesday—it is a slow boat.”

“Let's go and see the room now,” Donna proposed, jumping up. Five minutes later they were hard at work, sketching, measuring, and planning, all talking at once.

“He'll enjoy it; but he will never get the fun out of it that we're having now,” Donna said when they finally separated for the night.

All that week they worked, planning and devising things for a boy's comfort and amusement, neglecting or dropping their own daily work with generous readiness. It was their

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apology for their secret dismay. For all their faith in the bond that made them "Us," they were afraid. Little groups in a great city tend to scatter; the world is always tugging at their most valuable members, and a small thing may start a loosening of the bond. With their freedom of speech abridged, as it must be in a boy's presence, the charm might break; and presently the Sunday suppers in Charlotte's little flat would become memories, and the brightest height of their youth would be passed, the splendid morning would have turned to dull afternoon. Donna, foreseeing all this, fell into days of depression which culminated in a poem called "Afterwards"—which she sold for fifteen dollars, thereby greatly cheering herself. Paul became doubly affectionate, almost anxiously appreciative of them all, as though dimly realizing that he might be the first to go, since it was on him that the world's clutch fell most eagerly. (These five would have put Paul highest had he never laid his wonderful hands on clay or marble, and felt contempt for a world that increased its demand for him in simple, direct ratio to his growing fame.) The two playwrights were,

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as usual, impenetrably courteous, but Lorrimer Ffloyd smoked morosely and said sharp things about youth and crudity, and even Charlotte, at rare intervals between her maternal rejoicings, looked at them wistfully, as though begging them to be as wholly glad as she was. There was a faint hope—though no one but Lorrimer Ffloyd would have worded it—that a boy fresh from several years of an English boarding school would find them and their abstract topics a bore and take himself out of the way, but knowledge of Charlotte made that improbable: Charlotte's son would never be out of the way when anything whatever was going on. Lorrimer drew a bitter caricature of the six seated wearily about a round-eyed baby with a nursing bottle, but had the grace not to show it to Charlotte. The others met it with sounds of protest and loyalty in their throats, but they laughed guiltily. Ffloyd dropped the sketch into a portfolio of old cartoons and first draughts, and very soon forgot all about it.

There were several differences of opinion before the boy's room was finished. Lanse wanted muslin curtains on the little white iron bed, and the picture of a white surpliced boy

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chorister with upturned face hung over it—"it would give him such pretty little ideas"; but he was hooted down and a file of crouching, war-painted Indians hung in its place.

"He won't be any little angel boy if he's the son of Charlotte," commented Ffloyd. "He'll want blug."

By Saturday evening everything was practically done. Ffloyd's animals pranced along the walls bearing streamers of foolish verse such as any boy who was one of "Us" must love. There was a cupboard for games, already fitted with a pot of mucilage, a stamp album, and a lump of Paul's modeling clay. The books on the shelf above were chiefly what Ffloyd called hair curlers, though Lanse insisted on adding a volume of Keats—"just to see if he has a soul yet." After a final inspection, they shut the door on their labors and wandered vaguely about the little sitting room, all rather silent.

"It is the last week we shall ever really be just Us," Donna said, a little sadly.

"Come on, then," called Ffloyd with a desperate effort at gaiety, pushing tables and chairs back from the center of the room. "We'll finish up 'Alfaretta.'"

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"Oh, yes," exclaimed Lanse, beginning to brighten; this was his especial opportunity. "Alfaretta, the Little Slave Girl," was an unwritten play which had already been drawn through about nine acts on the spur of various moments. It had begun in a serious attempt to work out a dramatic situation, but had gradually degenerated into burlesque melodrama. They were all clever at impromptu, and as each actor was allowed to twist the plot in any way he chose, without warning, the action was frequently delayed until heroine or villain could recover from overmastering laughter.

It proved to be the "Storm Scene in the Castle" tonight, and Evelyn was supplying such realistic thunder and lightning on the piano that no one heard a ring at the flat door, and the sound of some one being admitted. They were in the act of rescuing the Little Slave Girl from a dungeon in the Haunted Wing when a deep voice startled them into an unintentional tableau, and a large, masculine presence filled the doorway. The stranger hesitated for a moment, evidently dazzled by the light, then began to smile.

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"I beg pardon," he said, "but —isn't one of you my mother?"

There was a cry from Charlotte, a startled, dismayed sound, and a look of bitter disappointment flashed across her face. Then she ran forward.

"Cameron!" she cried, and her son gathered her up in his arms very much as she had dreamed of gathering him up any night these three years.

There was a brief pause; then Floyd's voice broke the silence.

"So that's what you call a little boy, is it, Charlotte?" he asked drily.

She drew away and looked up at her son with bewildered eyes, in which a great wondering pride was dawning.

"I don't understand!" she exclaimed. "Cameron was so little!"

"But, my dear mother, that was three—nearly four years ago; and I was over twelve then. I have done an awful lot of growing," he added.

"Twelve—so you were," murmured Charlotte. "Some way, I never thought about age; you were such a baby! And all these years

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I've been looking at people's little boys—I never noticed their big ones!"

Paul came forward and held out his hand.

"You don't know us, and your mother is too excited to introduce us," he said, "but we're awfully glad to see you just the same. We didn't expect you till Wednesday."

"Why, I found I could come on a fast boat almost as cheap, so I changed at the last moment," said the boy, adding, with a laugh, "I wanted to surprise my mother."

"Well, you did," said Charlotte with a long breath. "Now, don't you want to go to your——"

Floyd gave a sudden wail.

"His room," he cried, "his little boy room!" He began to laugh hysterically. "The little white bed and the rabbits, and the hooks low down so that he can reach them!" There was a sound of dismay from Donna, and then they all began to laugh, weakly, helplessly. Cameron stared at them, bewildered.

"What is it? What have I done?" he demanded.

"Nothing, dear; you've just—grown," sobbed his mother.

"Oh, come and see it—Charlotte's little

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son's room!" cried Ffloyd, lifting his glasses to mop his eyes. "Come on!" They hurried the boy down the hall to the little room. His head nearly touched the gas fixtures and his splendid young shoulders seemed to reach from wall to wall. Ffloyd looked from him to the little iron bed and the file of Indians, and flung himself face down on the counterpane.

"Lanse's little choir boy," he wept.

Cameron stared about him, then his eyes fell on the frisking procession of animals that crossed the wall. With a whoop of spontaneous delight, he fell on his knees to study them.

"Oh, I say! Ripping!" he shouted. "Oh, look at that rabbit—oh, I say!"

They watched him breathlessly as he studied out one of the verses, quite unconscious that he was on trial. A splendid laugh, deep but with a boyish crack in it, set them all smiling at Charlotte.

"He's one of Us," they said. "Never mind his inches—he's one of Us."

CHAPTER II.

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“**S**EE here,” began Cameron after a long period of silence, looking about from one to another; “you’re all making money, aren’t you? You’re all geniuses, and famous, and that?”

Ffloyd, who was lying flat on his back across the divan in Sunday night contentment, took out his cigar and sent a puff of smoke up towards the ceiling.

“I’ll tell you about us,” he said seriously. “Paul doesn’t make money yet——”

“That’s too true to be funny,” objected Paul.

“But he is the real thing,” Ffloyd went on. “We all admit that we have genius, but other people are beginning to admit that Paul has. The G. P. hasn’t discovered him yet, but he’s secretly acquiring fame. People call him a sculptor as seriously as they would call a man a doctor or a lawyer. While when they call Donna a poet, they think they’re getting off a joke.”

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"Well, the joke isn't on me," said Donna placidly; "it's on the magazines."

"Donna and I make money," Ffloyd continued. "I have a certain cheap notoriety—I'm in vogue, while she has enormous industry and a blue hat with irises that she puts on which she goes to call on editors. The two together net her a fabulous income. She's entirely natural and simple, while Lanse and Evelyn are hot-house products, artificial——"

"Oh, Lorrimer!" came in indignant protest.

"I don't mean consciously so; they are genuine of their kind," Ffloyd amended. "But it's an elaborate, hypercivilized kind, a natural artificiality. They are drawing-room ornaments. Lanse may do something clever and ingenious, but he won't be great."

"He hasn't heard my third act yet," said Lanse; "he doesn't know."

"And how about my mother?" asked Cameron.

"Your mother," interposed Paul, "is an artist, and a lady, and the heart and center of Us."

"And she's a bully Alfaretta," added

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Ffloyd. Charlotte rose seriously, and bowed her thanks.

"Well, here's what I'm thinking," Cameron said, "Why can't I make some money, too? I've had loads of education—solid chunks of it; I don't see why I need any more."

"But there's no especial hurry, is there?" asked Ffloyd. "You have only been here a few weeks."

"I know; but when you have an expensive young mother on your hands——" Cameron began loftily, then ducked his head behind a defensive elbow and peered around it at Charlotte.

"Ungrateful cub," she commented. "What can you do, anyway? Where does your talent lie?"

"I might pose as a model," Cameron suggested. "Don't you want to do a young Greek god, Paul?"

"'Goliath at sweet sixteen' would be more appropriate," Donna observed, while they all laughed at the great overgrown figure drawn up Apollo fashion.

"I could use those big shoulders of yours," Paul said, studying him critically. "They've got the look of youngness and strength that I

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want for one of my iron workers. Bring them down, if you like."

"What'll you give me?" the boy asked.

"Cameron!" protested his mother. "I am ashamed of you. It is quite enough if Paul wants you to do it; you ought to feel very much honored." Cameron was entirely unabashed.

"Not much," he declared. "Honor be hanged. I want to earn money."

"You miserable little screw!" said Paul. "I'll give you fifty cents an hour."

"Is that what you generally pay?"

"Yes; and it's a lot for a scrub model that doesn't know anything."

"Cash down at the end of each sitting?"

Paul nodded.

"All right, then, it's a go;" and Cameron leaned back complacently.

"Well, I never supposed," said his mother disgustedly, "that I should live to see a son of mine driving such a bargain. Cameron, you're not one of Us. You don't belong. You're a sordid, unsensitive— Paul, I wish you wouldn't encourage him."

"I didn't suppose I had, exactly," Paul returned mildly.

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Cameron's shoulders went into business at nine the next morning, to his great excitement. Paul did not require a rigid attitude, and lounging in a pleasant studio began to seem a very desirable way of earning one's living before the morning was over.

"And the beggars get fifty cents an hour just for this!" he exclaimed.

"It isn't all just this," Paul returned. "Wait till you've had to pose for a disk thrower or a boar fighter or a Flying Mercury, if you want to know what backache and leg cramp are. I've seen models——"

There was a knock at the door, the off-hand patter of accustomed knuckles. Cameron, in an anguish of modesty, grasped a table cover and flung it about his bare shoulders while Paul went to the door. A tall girl with rough, short hair, and a painting apron of many hues covering her from neck to feet, stood frowning in on them. There was a gaunt beauty about her, and a disquieting look of wilful power.

"Paul," she began abruptly, "that beast of a model has failed me again. I've simply got to have one today. My stuff is promised for tomorrow. Don't you know any one who could help me out?"

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Paul considered.

"I could perhaps get Dougherty for you," he finally suggested; "that red-haired chap, you know."

"Too old," objected the girl. "I want a young fellow."

"Is Barnes engaged?"

"Oh, but he's such an ass! He stands like a block of wood and doesn't help one a bit. I want— That isn't a bad looking model you have there. Is he any good?" The clear voice made no pretense at a decent lowering, and Cameron, hugging his draperies, turned away, blushing furiously. She studied the back of his head with cool interest.

"He's a trifle ungainly, but I rather like him," she said. "Is his time all taken?"

"Well, I have him for the next few mornings," said Paul, biting his lips, "and I fancy his afternoons are—engaged."

"Are they?" she demanded. Cameron faced her reluctantly. Her voice was as compelling as a hand on his shoulder.

"Why, I—I'm afraid so," he said uncomfortably.

"Look here," said the girl; "if you can come to me for a couple of hours this afternoon, I'll

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pay you double rates—a dollar an hour. You're not worth it, but I'm in a strait." Cameron looked desperately at Paul, who wickedly refused to help him out, and was so plainly enjoying the situation that a gleam of defiant mischief came into the boy's eyes.

"Why, yes, ma'am, I think I can manage that," he said gravely.

"Oh, see here——" began Paul.

"I won't fail you, sir; I'll be here just as usual," interposed Cameron deftly; and shook a threatening fist when the girl was not looking.

"That's good," she said. "I'm on this floor, five doors down. I hope you've a fairly good suit—though it doesn't much matter. Paul, you've saved my life." And she went out, leaving a momentary silence behind her. Then Cameron began to dance with clumsy abandon, using the table cover for a scarf.

"Double rates, by jingo!" he exulted.

"But you're not going to do it?" protested Paul.

"Oh, I'm not?" commented the boy. "You wait, that's all." Then his voice became insinuating. "I say, Paul, you wouldn't be a low down telltale and spoil it, I know. It's

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just this one day. I give you my word I'll tell my mother all about it when I've the money in my hand; but if she knew now, she might annoy me. You'll keep dark, won't you?"

"Well, of course it's none of my business," said Paul reluctantly. "But—I don't know—Irene Potter isn't just the woman for a kid like you to— She's all right, but she has strange, pessimistic, brutal theories. I'd hate to have you——"

"Oh, I'm the dust under her feet!" said Cameron blithely. "She won't bother about me. Now come on and finish my low neck. Double rates! Oh, my!"

Cameron was inwardly shivering with joy and excitement when he knocked at the ground glass door bearing the name of "Irene Potter" in severe letters. Miss Potter opened the door for him, and gave a curt nod of approval at his clothes.

"That will do nicely," she said. "Just sit down a minute while I get this canvas ready."

He looked about with interest. The room had dull red walls, against which a litter of casts and sketches seemed to have been flung with savage energy. The furniture had the

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same air of having been roughly pushed into place. It was an angry room, splendid in colorings, but uncheerful and unfriendly. One of Charlotte's posters hung like a red flame near the door, and Cameron paused before it in boyish pride, hoping she would say something. As she did not notice, he finally ventured a half timid:

"This is nice."

She looked up.

"Um," she said. "It's a McLean poster—Charlotte McLean. There's nice feeling in it—she knows how to handle colors; but the drawing's rotten."

Cameron flushed angrily.

"I don't see it," he said shortly.

"Naturally; for you don't know anything about it," was the cool answer. "Look at that leg, from the knee down;" she measured it off with a pencil; "and now from the knee up. The proportion is all off. Can't you see?"

"The big magazines all take her work. She has all she can do," he said between his teeth.

"Oh, the magazines!"—with a shrug of contempt. "What do they know?" This heresy was too much for Cameron. He stood sulkily silent. She gave him a curious glance.

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"Why are you so vehement?" she asked. "Do you know Mrs. McLean?"

"Why—yes. She—she has been very kind to me," he managed to say.

"Yes, she would be. Sit down here, please. Cross your knees and lean back—that's right; you have intelligence. She has the traditional kind heart that you read about—it's almost extinct. Turn your head a little to the left—not quite so much—that's it. She is also very much in love with the sculptor you posed for this morning. Please don't move! You've spoiled the pose."

Cameron struggled to his feet, very white.

"I'm going. It isn't true," he stammered. "You shan't say such things." His voice broke, and hot tears came into his eyes.

"My dear boy!" She laid down her brush in amazement. "I'm not defaming the good lady. She has all the virtues. In time, no doubt, she will marry the wise and beautiful Paul and live happily ever after. I speak with all respect."

"She won't!" he broke out angrily. "She isn't! It's a lie!" He turned and fumbled blindly about for his hat. Miss Potter laid a compelling hand on his arm and led him to

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the divan. He resisted for a moment, then flung himself down and buried his face against a cushion.

"I know," she said, standing over him with folded arms. "It hurts like the devil. I'm sorry; but you've got to face it some time, and you might as well now. She is a woman over thirty, and you are a boy. What did you expect? You didn't think you could marry her, did you?" The question was derisive, but, before his tense silence, the amusement left her face. "Oh, people never marry when they care like that!" she went on bitterly. "You care and care and care—first for one, then another; and finally, when you've no care left in you and the fire is dead—you marry."

There was a long silence. Then Cameron lifted himself up; dragging the back of his hand across his forehead. There were dark spots on the red pillow.

"It isn't that," he said drearily. "It's—something different. Do you mind if I go?"

She frowned impatiently.

"Can't you stay, just two hours? You know I've depended on you; and my work has to be in tomorrow. Don't you think you can?"

Without a word, he took his former atti-

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tude, altering it to suit her directions, and sat motionless with eyes on the floor while she worked. She glanced at him curiously in the pauses and started several times to speak, but laid down her brushes, went behind the screen, and, coming back with a two-dollar bill in in her hand, held it out to him.

"Thank you," she said. "You're the best model I ever had. I'll give you all the work you want. I'm sorry I—blundered, you know." He looked straight up at her, all the boyishness gone out of his eyes.

"I don't want it," he said, motioning the money away. He was gone before she could protest.

Paul's door stood open as he passed and he heard a whistle of invitation, but he hurried on, and, without waiting for the elevator, plunged down the eight flights to the street. There he turned to the north and began to walk at a furious pace, his eyes fixed doggedly ahead.

Charlotte waited dinner for him half an hour, then ate in lonely state, realizing with a sense of surprise how forlorn she must have been all those years without him. She was a little uneasy, but supposed he was with Paul

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until that young man himself came in. He had expected to find Cameron giggling over his two dollars and his escapade, and his mother, half disapproving but wholly amused, ready to laugh at it all over again. When he heard that the boy had not come back he looked troubled, but said nothing. It was nine o'clock when they heard his step in the hall. Charlotte went to meet him.

"You bad boy," she said. "I have been quite worried about you. Come in and give an account of yourself." He paused in the doorway on seeing Paul, and the color rose in his face.

"I'm tired. I think I'll go to bed," he said, turning away. "I've just been on a long walk."

"But, dear, aren't you well? Don't you want any dinner?"

"No, nothing—I'm all right," he answered, avoiding her eyes. "Good night."

A moment later they heard the key turn in his lock.

"I knew I ought not to have let him," Paul exclaimed; and he told what he knew of Cameron's afternoon.

"Irene Potter—oh, yes," said Charlotte

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slowly. "An evil genius sort of a girl. I met her at a luncheon once, and she criticised your Nimrod; whereupon I rose and slew her. I was violently excited, I remember. The idea of her daring to! But, Paul, how could she have upset the boy so?"

"Oh, she always makes trouble; just to breathe in the same room with her is dangerous," he answered irritably. "She's storm incarnate. Confound her!"

"Oh, well, I don't believe it is anything. He will sleep it off." Charlotte's tone was anxious, in spite of her words. "Perhaps he'll tell me in the morning. Is he going to sit for you again?"

"I suppose so," Paul answered, getting up to go. "He was hilarious all this morning. I wish I didn't feel so to blame."

"There's no gaining man's estate without growing pains," said Charlotte with a sigh. "Good night, my dear. You're such a comfort, Paul!"

Cameron did not go to the studio in the morning. After a very silent breakfast, he left the house and wandered aimlessly about the park till noon, crushed under a burden of shame that he would some day smile to re-

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member, but that now blotted out every other feeling except a terrible sense of loneliness, of being thrown aside. He went back at luncheon time, utterly tired out, but when he found Paul seated at the table in his place, talking earnestly with Charlotte, he turned and went out again without a word.

The two looked at each other in real alarm.

"That is no little boy trouble," said Charlotte. "I tried and tried this morning to make him tell me, but I couldn't get within miles of him. Paul, we must find out."

"I'm going to," he said, rising. "I'll come back later."

He went straight to his own building and knocked on the ground glass door labeled "Irene Potter."

"Come in, Paul," she called lazily. She was lying back in a big chair with her finished drawings propped up in front of her, studying them through a haze of cigarette smoke.

"Good stuff, aren't they?" she said, indicating the pictures with her cigarette. "Much too good for that stupid magazine. I suppose they'll kick at the price, as usual."

Paul came and stood directly in front of her, leaning on a chair back.

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"Irene," he began, "you know that boy that posed for you yesterday?" She nodded with a slight frown. "What did you do to him?" Paul demanded, looking straight into her eyes.

"Why," she said with a shrug, "I performed a very necessary surgical operation—though quite unintentionally. I don't deserve any credit."

"Trimmed off a few illusions?"

An angry spark came into her eyes.

"Not in the least. I merely made a casual remark about a woman—with whom, as it turned out, he is in love. I couldn't have foreseen that, exactly."

"In love!" Paul exclaimed. "What nonsense, Irene! He's a boy, an infant. He is not in love with any one. I know it. Who was the girl?"

"Not a girl at all—a lady who does posters, and frequently gets out of the elevator on this floor." A startled look crossed Paul's face and his eyes turned involuntarily towards the crimson poster by the door. She nodded.

"What did you say of her?"

"Nothing derogatory. Merely what you know better than any one, Paul!" Her eyes

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challenged his and he would not lower them, though he knew he had turned white. "Surely you are not pretending to think it's a disgrace for a woman to be in love with a man?" she pursued temperately. "You're not going back to that silly convention?"

He turned away abruptly, but at the door he paused.

"That was her son," he said, and went out. He heard her break into a startled laugh as he shut the door, and the color surged up into his face. He half turned back, then went on to his own rooms.

"What's the use?" he muttered. "She couldn't understand. Oh, good God!"

Charlotte was sitting idly by the fire, too troubled to work, when Cameron came in again.

"Well, little boy?" she said, holding out her hand to him. He came and leaned against the fireplace, his eyes on the coals.

"Mother," he said, "I want to go to work—I don't care what or how. This posing was just fun, of course. I want to do some real work, if it's only as an office boy. I hope you won't object?" He tried to make his voice

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cool and formal, but for all his efforts it trembled.

"Not if you want to, dear," she said quietly; "though I hoped you would go through college. We are not hard up now—we have more than we spend, with what I earn. Did you think we were?"

He knelt down and began to stir the coals.

"But things may not stay just the same," he said, trying to speak casually. "You might—marry, or something. That would——" He broke off abruptly.

"Marry!" exclaimed Charlotte in such genuine amazement that his shoulders betrayed a little start of joy. "Marry? My dear boy, I have no intention of doing any such thing." He turned and met her eyes for the first time that day.

"O mother, truly?" he exclaimed, laying both his hands on her knees.

"Truly, my dear child! How could you have taken such an idea?"

He leaned up against her and laid his face on her hands. "Oh, gee!" he breathed. Then he gave a little laugh. "I'm so glad," he explained.

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"You take life rather hard, little boy," she said regretfully. "I'm afraid you are one of Us, after all! Would it be so very dreadful to you?" she added after a pause, her eyes on the fire. He nodded, with a long breath.

"Well, dear, I never will while you feel that way. You may be perfectly certain of that," she said cheerfully, stroking his hair. But there was a look on her face that he would remember and understand years later. One comes slowly to the discovery that thirty-five is not the middle age it once seemed, and that youth and the zest for life do not always end at the traditional limits.

Paul came in that night, to find Donna and Lorrimer already there, and Cameron in uproarious spirits. He looked a question at Charlotte, who smiled reassuringly.

"It is all right," she said to him. "The poor child had a nonsensical idea in his head, but it's gone now. You are pale tonight, Paul."

"And you're tired," he answered. The sympathy of his voice brought a sudden look of tears to her eyes.

"O Paul," she said again, "you're such a comfort!"

CHAPTER III.

DONNA'S LAST WEEK.

“**I** THINK the man was a cad,” declared Paul. “He knew he had to suffer, anyway—there was nothing on earth she could do to help or prevent it; he might have had the grace to keep it to himself.”

“I don’t know,” objected Floyd; “I think he had a right to the help of her sympathy if he wanted it.”

“Besides,” added Charlotte, “would she ever have forgiven him for shutting her out at the very biggest moment of his life? I wouldn’t, I know—no matter what suffering it saved me.”

“That’s just it,” said Paul excitedly; “he ought to have been big enough to take even her unforgiveness if it kept her from going through that horrible ordeal with him, inch by inch. Lord! Think what it must have meant to her!” He got up and began to walk restlessly about the room.

“Paul is right,” said Donna, who had been

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listening with the wide-eyed absorption she gave to everything. "I agree with him absolutely."

"How unusual!" commented Floyd, and they all laughed, Donna as heartily as any one. "How does it feel, Paul, to be the center of an admiring circle?" Floyd went on.

"How does it feel to be a silly ass?" Paul returned shortly.

This conversation came back to Donna with sudden force as she left the doctor's a few days later, looking white and limp.

"Now, you are not to worry," the doctor had said. "I will find out all about the dog, but it's ninety-nine to a hundred he was just ill tempered. He'll never bite any one again, I can tell you. Come in and let me see you every day or two, but don't think about it any more than you can help."

"Oh, of course it's all right. I shan't worry," Donna had said cheerfully. They knew this was sheer bravado, but it eased the situation. They were both so afraid she would cry.

She went home to her little bachelor apartment and curled up, feeling very weak and sick, to face the matter. How would they

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all take it? Paul would be distressed; he would want to know all about it, to the last detail, and he would make her the center of importance for the time being. She smiled up at a plaster head of his Nimrod on the wall above. Floyd would be concerned—when he remembered. He would ask her frequently how she was, and listen to her answer if it was not too long. Lanse would take it from the picturesque angle and enjoy it immensely, while Evelyn would send flowers. Charlotte would be all sympathy and anxiety, and Cameron would be outrageously funny on the subject. But every one of them would be uneasy, she knew. Paul's words, "He might have had the grace to keep it to himself," came back to her persistently. Paul was right. No one must be told.

Late in the afternoon the doctor called her to the telephone for further particulars about the accident. He had not been able to find the dog. Neighbors declared that it belonged to the grocery on the corner, but the grocery swore that it was the property of a boy who had been discharged that morning and whose whereabouts were unknown. The doctor spoke tentatively of a hospital and the Pas-

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teur treatment, "to be on the safe side," but Donna vigorously refused.

"That dog wasn't mad," she insisted. "He was merely cross. He didn't foam at the mouth or anything."

"Just what did he do?"

Her details were meagre. She had passed a curly brown and white dog without really noticing him; an instant later she had felt a vicious clutch just above her ankle. A thin youth with yards of red wrist had pulled off the dog; he must have been the discharged grocer's boy. Some one was named Pete—probably the dog; yes, of course—the boy wouldn't have yelled his own name; but it was all very confused. A car had come just then and she had hurriedly taken it to get away from the crowd.

"But we shall hear of his biting other people, if he has rabies," she insisted.

"No doubt," said the doctor drily. "Still, my advice to you——"

But Donna would hear nothing of advice that immured her in a hospital. "Mad dogs don't happen to people, you know; they are only newspaper incidents," she explained.

Her confidence was not quite so assertive

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when she had hung up the receiver; but a literary cast of mind is a great blessing. Instead of facing the chance of hydrophobia as the average person would, with dismal forebodings resulting in general depression, Donna scented a valuable situation, and felt a distinct exhilaration at the idea of working it out with herself as heroine. She was never proof against "copy," even when furnished at her own expense.

"Now," she said triumphantly, as she went to bed that night, "I will live just as I would if I knew for certain these were my last weeks on earth. I don't know whether I will be good or bad, but I'll be something!"

During the next few days, while the two ugly marks above her right shoe top were still painful, Donna put her wardrobe in exquisite order, replacing buttons that had been off for months, cleaning the insides of collars and the under sides of sleeves, and throwing away disreputable treasures in the way of battered slippers and broken combs. The wild confusion of papers in her desk was replaced by a few neat packages, one of them labeled, "To be destroyed in case of my death." She took a great satisfaction in that. Everything

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was prepared for inspection, even to the erasing of some marginal marks she had made in her Swinburne at an earlier stage of her development. Then, still limping a little, she went off to Sunday night tea at Charlotte's.

"From a coroner's standpoint, everything is perfect," she said to herself. "Now to make the most of things!"

The last comer had left the flat door unlatched, so she let herself in without ringing the upper bell. Charlotte's splendid laugh, that they all loved and did their best to rouse, came from the sitting room. Donna paused in the unlighted sitting room and looked in at them. Ffloyd, tipped back in his chair, and smoking, of course, was laying down the law to Cameron, who listened with boyish intentness. Lanse and Evelyn were making the toast, talking in their usual excited undertone. According to Ffloyd, there had not been a pause in their conversation for five years. Paul was pouring oil, drop by drop, into the bowl in which Charlotte was mixing her mayonnaise. They seemed so satisfied, so complete without her, that Donna felt suddenly neglected and desolate.

"If I came back from the dead, that is the

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way I should find them," she thought miserably. "I am utterly unimportant and forgotten. If Charlotte were away, they would all be lost and forlorn. And if Paul——"

"Why," exclaimed Charlotte suddenly, "Donna rang the lower bell five minutes ago. Why doesn't she come up?"

"I'll go and see," three of them began at once; and Donna could have died for them in her gratitude. Her spirits rose with a jump. She came forward with a happy laugh.

"Here she is. Your front door wasn't shut," she said. "You all looked so nice, I stopped to admire you."

"Bet you hoped we'd say something good about you," suggested Ffloyd, giving her chair a friendly shake.

"What a pity we didn't!" added Paul, smiling across at her. A little glow spread all through her till she could have cried in her happiness and relief. She was still one of "Us;" she still mattered to them. They would really care if——

"Look here," she began presently; "if you knew, each one of you, that you had just a little while—say a week more to live, how would you spend it? Would you be very good

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—or very bad? What would you do?”

“You mean, you’d be perfectly certain to die at the end of the seven days?” Floyd asked. She nodded expectantly. “Why,” he said, looking at her gravely through a haze of smoke, “I’d marry you, Donnie.”

She laughed.

“Well, I’d rather be your widow than some people’s wife,” she admitted. “What would the rest of you do?”

Lanse, whose pink and white skin and silvery blond hair were only faintly contradicted by the worldly wisdom of his eyes, looked up seriously.

“I should work up a big exit some way,” he said. “I’d spend every cent I possess, throw it right and left—ten dollars to the bootblack, fifty to the waiter; live *en prince* and time it so that there wouldn’t be one cent left when I died—not even to bury me with. Think what a jolly sensation it would make!”

“Most of us couldn’t play that game more than one day,” objected Charlotte. “In fact, I couldn’t live *en prince* much over twenty minutes. What would you do, Paul?”

“I think I should devote myself absolutely to the people I was fond of,” he began. “I

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would be to them all the things I could be now, but some way don't get time for. If I felt affectionate, I'd show it just as I pleased without bothering about consequences and misunderstandings. Lord, wouldn't it be a relief! I've been cramped all my life. Now, when we came in tonight, and you laughed that wonderful laugh of yours, Charlotte, and I hadn't seen you for three days—I wanted to give you a large embrace.”

“Well, why on earth didn't you?” demanded Charlotte.

“Mother, remember that I am here,” Cameron interposed with great dignity, but got no attention whatever.

“It wouldn't do,” Paul said sadly. “I—I learned that early in life. It makes trouble, and women don't understand. You might, Charlotte, but you're the only one; and I wouldn't risk it. But with seven days' warning, wouldn't I let go!”

“What else would you do?” asked Lanse.

“I'd make faces at every one I disliked,” said Paul, growing excited. “If strangers irritated me by the quality of their voices or the shape of their noses, I'd swear at them. And if I saw a woman who was beautiful on the

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street, I'd go up and tell her so and thank her for it."

"Yes, and you'd spend six happy days in the lockup," said Cameron. That rather quenched the discussion; but Donna had found her way.

"I would be to them all the things I could be now, but someway don't get time for," she repeated to herself. "Oh, beautiful!"

She said little that evening, but sat watching them with shining eyes. The little group meant so much to her. Charlotte had her son, Lanse and Evelyn had big homes and families and social ties, Paul's contact with life was rich and many-sided, and Lorrimer Floyd was self absorbed, little dependent on human relations; but Donna had no other world, and desired none. Having a modest spirit, she often marvelled, alone at home, that they should so value her, never realizing how the inborn gift that gave her fresh vision for little common daily things lent charm to her speech; never recognizing that the whole-souled devotion, the unstinted admiration, which she poured out as a cheerful matter of course, were anything more than a friend's due offering.

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Donna evidently has a marketable idea," commented Charlotte. "She sits there simply radiating light. What is it—fiction?"

"No, 'ffection," said Donna.

"Which of us do you like best?" asked Lorimer Ffloyd, who was given to probing and uncomfortable questions, and had a vivisectionist's cool interest in watching the results. Paul made a sound of protest, but Donna was not disturbed.

"That is like asking whether I like my heart or my lungs best," she objected. "You are a whole, don't you see. You're Us."

Cameron, much taken with the simile, wanted to extend it, and had to be suppressed by his mother. She would have changed the subject, but Ffloyd stuck to his attack.

"You are all so afraid of the truth," he complained. "I mean, every one is, everywhere. Now, I haven't a doubt that Donna really likes me best;" all that was nicest in Ffloyd came out in his smile; "but wild horses could not make her say so. Yet why should it hurt the rest of you, when you each know in your hearts that you like some one best?"

"Oh, but it isn't that!" they all began at once, then stopped with a laugh. "It is what

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you might infer, with your masculine conceit," Charlotte explained.

"If Donna could be wholly honest, I should have no chance to pride myself on a conquest—unless it were a fact;" Ffloyd spoke with the deliberate precision of one who makes a principle of calling a spade a spade. "As things are now, she may be breaking her heart about me, for all I know."

"But what good would it do for you to know?" Donna asked gravely.

"It concerns me: I have a right to the knowledge. The biggest courage doesn't hide things—it shows them. Now, if Charlotte, for instance, were absolutely honest——"

"She would say that we are all longing for some music," cut in Charlotte, suspecting mischief.

"We are, indeed," echoed Paul with relief.

"Cowards," muttered Ffloyd; but his laugh betrayed him.

Evelyn went to the piano and played them all into harmony and peace. It was her most definite contribution to their solidarity, for, though, apart with Lanse, she was notoriously fluent, she seldom talked in the group. While the rest lounged and argued, she sat slenderly

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erect, her chair a little back in the shadow, her face, delicate, well bred and inscrutable, turned intently to each speaker. Sometimes, in their excited discussions, they would seem to forget that she was there; yet, when she was away, they felt curiously incomplete. There was a touch of mystery in her silent presence; a sense of another world than theirs of hard work and plain fare lay about her clothes and hair, the very texture of her skin, and gave her subtle distinction.

If her bearing was worldly, her playing "came straight from heaven," as Charlotte said. Tonight it had for Donna a special message. Even while her practical sense flouted the idea of bodily danger, her literary instinct played with images of death, with partings and renunciations, with love that must express itself while there was yet time. When the evening was over and she went down the stairs with Lorrimer, she slipped her arm through his, laying her doubled fist in his palm. His fingers closed over it at once and he smiled down at her through his glasses. If he was surprised, he did not show it.

"So you like me, do you?" he suggested.

"Rather," she said. It was Paul's word, and

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she used it with conscious enjoyment, as though it were a little indulgence she had allowed herself.

"How much?" he went on in an amused voice. But Donna, oppressed by what might be hanging over her, answered him with sudden seriousness:

"More than you have any idea of—more than you can ever guess." There was a tremor in the hand he held, and tragic earnestness in the eyes that were lifted to his. A startled look crossed Floyd's face.

"Is anything troubling you, Donna?" he asked with an effort. The impulse to tell him was strong for the moment, but she fought it back.

"Yes, but I can't tell you about it. Don't ask me," she said wistfully.

"I am so sorry!" He pressed her arm closer to his side, and they went on in silence. He was so protective at crossings, so considerate and gentle in manner, that Donna, whose mind was all on last words, forgot that he might not understand, and let her love of life and of dear friends shine out for a moment through her good night. Taking his hand,

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she lifted it to her cheek and held it there.

"Dear Lorrimer!" she murmured, and left him. "Now, if anything happens, he will remember that," she said to herself with sad satisfaction.

Ffloyd, meanwhile, stood for a dazed interval staring at his hand.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, it can't be that!" he exclaimed under his breath as he went away. "I never dreamed of it. It can't be! What shall I do?"

The more Ffloyd thought about it, the more uneasy he became. That foolish conversation about absolute honesty returned to harrass him. It was not as if Donna were a demonstrative person. Even with Charlotte he had seldom seen her go farther than a half mocking hand clasp. There was something new in her eyes. He had felt it when she had first come in that evening and, in answer to some trivial remark of greeting he had made, her face had lighted up with a glow that was not so far from tears. It had troubled and stirred him for a moment, and it now came vividly back to him.

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"Donna—poor little Donna! What shall I do?" he exclaimed.

Lorrimer Ffloyd was fond of stating, with dry indifference, that he was not "successful" with women. And it was true that on the rare occasions when he had been roused to sue for favor, he had not won it. He was too abrupt, too readily scornful, for the attitude of suitor; his prickly vanity never realized that others might have an equal sensitiveness. That love might come unsought, and that, by a mere experiment in words, he had stumbled on the Open Sesame to the secret, was too fantastic for sober belief; yet all night his hand felt the curve of Donna's cool cheek, and the echo of her "Dear Lorrimer!" kept him swinging between elation and black gloom, for the next few years of his life were very definitely marked out, and the plan had no place for ties and obligations. Time enough for those after he had achieved Paris! He set himself grimly to work in the morning, with the doors to sentiment tightly shut.

His workroom was a big, charmless place, more attic than studio, baldly clean, furnished only with drawing implements, a long table, a few wooden chairs and a small gas stove.

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His tiny bedroom across the hall had the same whitewashed bareness, though two of its walls were crossed by a band of intricate pencil marks, tangled record of the ideas for cartoons that came to him in the darkness of the night. When the space convenient to his arm was used up, he moved the bed. Beyond this, not one touch of personality could be found in either room, or an object that was not the cheapest of its kind. Perfect cleanness and abundant fresh air were the only mitigations. This raw asceticism was not compulsory, for his work commanded a good income; it was purely a part of his present theory of life. Another year might find him lapped in luxury, for Floyd was essentially an experimenter.

By noon he had worked himself into a state of mind as severe as his surroundings, and set about preparing his lunch with a dry smile of satisfaction at his own strength of character. He had spread a clean newspaper across one end of the table, set out bread and cheese and started his cocoa boiling when there was a knock at the studio door.

"Come in," he called inhospitably; "if you

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must," was implied. The door opened on a laugh.

"It sounded more like 'Keep out!'" said Donna. She had on the hat with irises, and her face was lighted with adventure. "May I really come in?"

"Why, yes, do." Ffloyd spoke constrainedly, stirring his cocoa as though there were not a minute to spare. Donna laid several packages on the table, then stood considering him.

"Absolute honesty, Lorrimer," she began, "forces me to mention that I came to lunch with you. I have brought a grape-fruit and some cold tongue and four rolls—nice, fresh ones"—her voice had taken on a mischievous humility," and salted peanuts. It is a very expensive grape-fruit. And I have done some verses for you, so you see I really had an excuse for coming. They are *nice* verses, Lorrimer. And there is an editor gaping for them, so if you did care to do some pictures—if you really wanted to——"

The spoon dropped into the saucepan with a clatter.

"Oh, stop it!" commanded Ffloyd, between exasperation and amusement. "Get yourself

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a knife and fork out of the table drawer, and don't be an utter idiot."

"Now we are all right," said Donna comfortably, and began to jerk the strings from her packages. The buoyancy of hidden excitement was in her movements, for she had just been to the doctor, and had divined in him a stimulating anxiety. So long as she was convinced, herself, that the dog had not been mad, medical concern on the subject was rather thrilling, and vivified her secret drama of last days. "You make one feel so perfectly at home, Lorrimer. I always say that tact is the—where are your saucers?—is the—I want plates, too, please, unless you prefer newspaper—is the—Lorrimer, you really *are* glad to see me, aren't you?"

A glint of the morning's stoicism came into his eyes. Two could play at this game of perfect honesty.

"I am not sure that I am," he said, taking the grape-fruit away from her and preparing it with beautifully neat, deft movements of his knife. "You destroy the scheme of my room. What is the use of making it bleak and bald and austere, if a warm, colored thing like you is going to burst in and upset all the values?"

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He glanced up to see how she took it, and met a look so worried that his severity relaxed. When Ffloyd smiled, one remembered, with surprise, that he had once been a little boy—perhaps even a dear and lovable little boy. Donna smiled back reassured.

“Values—this room!” she protested. “It hasn’t any. Why will you live in such hideousness?”

“I suppose it needs some dear little woman to make it cosy and homelike?” He spoke mockingly, but with a keen eye on her and a quickened beat in his heart.

“It needs some dear little woman to make you move into a human habitation,” she returned with spirit.

Ffloyd drew up a chair for her on the other side of the table.

“My wife would have to live my way,” he warned her. They were bold words, “my wife.” Donna divined the thrill beneath them, and, realizing that mortal lips might never speak them of her, felt chilled and shadowed. Dying might not be all drama, after all.

“Ah, I wonder whom you will marry?” she said wistfully.

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Ffloyd felt that the brutal truth was best. "No one at all for the next few years," he said gently. "I can't, Donna. My work won't allow it."

She welcomed the chance to give him good advice. He would remember it if—

"Don't put it off too long, Lorrimer," she said, leaning towards him in her earnestness. "You need it—more than most men, I think. You could easily grow rather—callous. You force yourself to be cold, just because you are so tender hearted, and you hate to be hurt. But it is better to be hurt, my dear—oh, to be hurt with knives!—than to shut yourself away. I *know*."

He did not look at her, but her voice told him that her eyes were misty. He was being hurt at that moment, even with knives, and made a desperate effort to get away.

"So you recommend marriage because it is painful?" he scoffed.

"Love hurts, but what if it does?" she returned gravely. "There is nothing else, Lorrimer; nothing else on earth, except work. And that comes second."

"I wonder!" He pushed back his chair with a sudden thrust of his arms and started

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to his feet. "I haven't renounced because I wanted to, I can tell you. It seemed to me the only way. I have got to succeed, Donna, I've got to go far. I would crawl over red-hot ploughshares to get where I want to be! And yet, if I am paying the wrong price—" he paused at the back of her chair, an excited laugh in his voice: "Are you the higher wisdom, or are you Eve, the temptress?"

"I am only your best friend," she said with a sobriety that checked him, bringing him back to his seat with a shrug and a laugh.

"Thank you, best friend. I will think it over," he assured her. "Have some bread and cheese? By the way, where is the poetry?"

She took out a typewritten sheet from the front of her blouse, which carried her works so often that Ffloyd had likened it to the kangaroo's pouch for her young. The long habit of working together brought them back to their normal relation of cheerful intimacy, frank criticism and ready laughter. Before their meal was over, he had begun to sketch the illustrations; and Donna cleared the table, that he might go immediately to work. He would not allow her to wash the dishes.

"You would not do it properly," he asserted,

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bent down over his work, his near-sighted eyes close to the paper. "You never can do my dishes, Donna, until you have a higher standard about the bottoms of glasses and the sides of dishpans."

"Old maid! Do them yourself, then." And she went off indignant, which was not at all in accordance with the literary laws of partings that may prove final. When her step had died away, Floyd dropped his pencil and lay back in his chair, his head resting on clasped hands, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, smiling deeply to himself.

The bright face of danger is apt to become clouded by night, especially if one lives alone, and has a vivid imagination. It came to Donna that evening that she had been a fool to resist her doctor, to run even the least chance of losing her full measure of life. The thought did not come after the gradual manner of reasoned conclusions, but suddenly, with no warning, like a dreadful message from without. A death's head, springing at her from the pages of her book, could not have brought a sharper recoil, or left her paler. Death was real and awful—good, warm, sweet life was all she knew, all she dared know yet.

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The faces of her friends, sketched or photographed, turned to her from the walls with something pitying in their immoveable regard; the very walls of this, her home, looked sentient in their dear familiarity. She pressed her cheeks and her outstretched arms against them.

"My own little home," she whispered. The place was mother as well as home to her. And she had earned it, every inch, sitting-room to the sun, cool, white bedroom, tiled bath, and absurd little kitchen: out of her own talent and labor had come her right to live like this. It stood for success, and success meant long life; successful, happy people did not die young.

"Oh, don't they?" seemed to come mockingly from Floyd's caricature of himself over her desk.

"Yes, they do," she cried, huddling down on the floor with her head against the couch.

Quite unconsciously, she had taken the position that she usually squirmed into when the fervor of literary composition was highest; and perhaps it was this that by association presently brought her healing craft to her rescue. The glow of

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creation began to spread through her drooping body; her head lifted, her eyes took on a starry fixity. With a fumbling hand she reached for pad and pencil, and sat brooding over them, breathless and utterly happy. She had conceived a wonderful set of letters, her good-by letters to the beloved six. They should not be sentimental nor self-indulgent, nor should they harrow, as last letters usually feel privileged to do. A fine restraint was to be the keynote. Restraint, gayety, deep affection; above all, a pleasant naturalness, the tone of every day intercourse: they must not hurt. The beauty of this resolution set tears streaming down her cheeks. Soon living sentences began to shape themselves, to Paul, to Charlotte, to Ffloyd. She noted them down as they came, then, taking a fresh sheet, she began:

“My dearest Lorrimer.”

The letter streamed from her pencil, the warmest, bravest letter ever written by friend to friend. She sobbed over it, and did not even take time to dry her eyes. It was a letter to comfort and sustain and cheer—and to break the heart by its very absence of self pity. There came a day when Ffloyd did read it—

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with Donna chuckling opposite him; and was brought so low that it took a week to cheer him again. But at the time she had no least suspicion that she should ever find in it cause for smiling. She had gone flying down a second big sheet when a ring at her doorbell rent the chrysalis of dream that she had spun round herself and tipped her out, tear-stained and dishevelled, into awkward actuality.

She thought at first that she would not answer it. Then she remembered that a package was due, and hastily rubbed her face, turning out the light in the entry before she opened the door.

"Paul!" She stood wavering between dismay at her plight and the joy of seeing him, the doorknob inhospitably clutched. It was useless to hope that anything whatever would escape Paul's notice; already there was a reflected distress in his eyes as he stood smiling, bent a little forward, one hand against the doorpost, eager to pretend obliviousness if that would make it easier for her.

"I only stopped to say hello, Donna; perhaps you are busy," he said, and drew back to show how simply she might be rid of him.

"No, no! Come in." She threw the door

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wide, with a laugh at herself. "I have been howling, but don't mind—it is all over. Go in and wait while I tidy up."

"Poor dear!" He took her hand between his, then passed on obediently into the sitting-room. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

She answered cheerfully from her room. "Of course. My new blouse has not come home, and it was promised on their honor. Wouldn't that make anyone howl?"

"Rather! I should—"

Donna had gone to wash her face, and did not notice that Paul's voice had stopped short. Crossing the room, he had stooped to pick up a sheet of impetuous writing that lay on the floor, and had been struck silent by its salient heading. "My dearest Lorrimer!" The words, written coolly in ink, might have meant no more than close friendship. But the sweep of this would have proclaimed emotion, even without the marks of tears on the paper; and, read by the light of Donna's tragic eyes, it told of secret storm and suffering. Paul thrust the sheet into the pad on the couch and went as far from it as possible, perturbed and bewildered. That, with all their closeness, they should know so little of each other's inner

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lives, was his first wonder—quickly forgotten in poignant sympathy for brave, gay Donna and a prickling irritation against Lorrimer Ffloyd. It was not fair to hurt Donna!

“I wanted to wear that blouse to-morrow,” she said, coming in. “It is a perfect love, Paul.”

He took her tone, grateful for the decency of her reserve, but poured out upon her, in look and voice, the pitying warmth of his sympathy; and Donna, wholly cheered and buoyant in the reaction, did not dream what a pathetically brave figure she appeared with her ready laughter and her heavy eyelids. She only knew that Paul was more “dear” even than usual; and that if at the end of things she should be allowed one mighty boast, it would be, “Paul found me worth while!”

“You have done me good,” she said when he rose to go. “I don’t care anything about the blouse, now. You were good to come, Paul.”

“I am right there, Donna, if you want me,” he said, and went home wrung by the bravery of her unclouded good night.

Two hours later he was awakened by a

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knock on his studio door. He stumbled across in the dark and opened it, to find Ffloyd panting outside.

"Elevator wasn't running, and I—walked up all eight flights—without stopping," he explained. "Paul, I don't know what to do, and you've got to help me."

Paul turned up the light, wrapped himself in a dressing-gown and lit a cigarette. His silence had a touch of austerity, but Ffloyd was too troubled to notice or care.

"It is this everlasting business of marriage," he burst out. "We have settled it a hundred times—that an artist can't marry until he has passed a certain point, that it is death to—for God's sake, give me a new argument against it. I have gone over and over the old ones until they are so much words."

Paul eyed him inscrutably as he stumbled near-sightedly about the room.

"Are you in love?" he asked finally. The question seemed to startle Ffloyd; he came to a halt, settling slowly down on the arm of a chair.

"Why, I don't know." He pondered over it for several minutes. "One wants to marry, of course. And when it is about the nicest

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girl in the world— The situation is new to me," he added with the precise enunciation that he reserved for naming spades. "Now, you are used to having women fall in love with you, so probably you don't find it so disturbing."

Paul frowned. "I don't see how I can help you," he said shortly.

"Also, it is quite possible that I have misunderstood," Ffloyd went on, too troubled to resent his impatience. "But, supposing it true—man, say something. Try to save me."

"Do you really want to be saved?"

"I don't know, I tell you."

"Then go back to your work till you do know—that is my advice."

"Work! How can I work with—" He sighed and rose to leave. "I hoped you would have advised me to go ahead. Then I might have proved to us both how impossible it was." At the door he turned back. "Of course you won't say anything—"

"Oh, yes; I shall put it in the morning papers," Paul said. When Ffloyd had gone he finished his cigarette, staring up at the light. Then he rose with a stretch and a sigh.

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"That poor little girl," he said half aloud. "I wish Ffloyd were more—oh, well!"

Donna's little kitchen was used only when she felt domestic, or tired of the café downstairs. On Saturdays she was very apt to "revert to femininity," as she called it, and spend happy hours over the stove, the cook book on the table held open with a salt shaker, and every dish, fork and spoon in the place in some way becoming involved in her operations. She was too spent with past emotion, the next day, to attempt lunch, but by mid-afternoon the cook book began to assert its charm, and, after a brief resistance, she set out to buy materials. She had not passed the scene of her accident since it happened, and she looked about the fatal corner with reminiscent interest. A boy stood in the door of the grocery, the very boy of interminable red wrists who had owned the dog, and had been declared discharged. Donna, bent on investigating, went in.

"I though you were not here now," she said pleasantly, after buying some fruit. The boy, evidently not recognizing her, explained that he had merely been "off" for a week. "What has become of your dog?" she went on. He

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glanced quickly at her, then looked off in embarrassment.

"Oh, that dog ain't here any more now," he answered.

"I heard that he had bitten a lady," she spoke quite impersonally. "A dog like that ought to be shot."

"Yes'm, he was shot," said the boy uneasily. "He never bit no one before. He wasn't a cross dog."

"Why do you suppose he did it? Was he—mad?"

"Yes'm, that was it. He was mad."

Donna felt a deadly numbness of brain and limb. Outwardly, she took her fruit and waited for her change, then went home to her apartment and put her things away just as usual; but her inner self was quite unconscious of all this. She only realized that what she had taken for a pleurably alarming little drama had suddenly turned into dreadful reality. All the glamour and excitement were gone. Even the literary imagination fails of comfort when the alternatives are insanity or a horrible death. She called up her doctor, but he was out, so she left an urgent message for him; then lay on her couch without stirring,

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her arms across her face, until the afternoon was gone and the room was dark. At last with a long breath she pulled herself up.

"Well, at any rate, I'll have the grace to keep it to myself," she said aloud, pushing back her hair and resting her hot forehead in her hands. She lit the lights and began to straighten herself, looking curiously at her flushed face in the mirror. When she turned to her washstand, a little bottle on the shelf above caught her eye with its skull and cross-bones. It was some laudanum she had had for an aching tooth. She took it down and looked at it intently.

"If it doesn't come on too fast—" she said.

And then, all at once, she was afraid, afraid as she had never been before in her life; afraid of the blackness of the closet, of the silent room with its watching mirror, of the little bottle with the staring label. With shaking hands she pinned on her hat and, catching up her coat, ran from the horrors that had taken up their abode there.

Paul was lying back in a deep chair reading somewhat sleepily, and called an absent "Come!" to the knock on his door. When Donna entered, pale and unusual looking, he

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stared at her, too surprised to move. She went straight to him and, dropping on her knees by his chair, took his arm in both her hands.

"Paul, if you had been out, I think I should have died," she said, and, burying her face against his sleeve, she began to cry. He rubbed her shoulder gently with his other hand.

"Poor girl!" he whispered; "poor little Donna!" After a moment she pulled herself up resolutely.

"There. I'm all—right," she said brokenly. "I had an attack of the horrors. I couldn't stand being alone another minute."

Paul thought he understood.

"I know," he said; "and you're bothered. Do you want to tell me about it?"

She turned away from the temptation and shook her head. "I'll have the grace to bear it alone," she said to herself.

He put her in the big chair, brought a rug and cushions, and shaded the lamp from her with a newspaper. She watched him with grateful eyes, immeasurably comforted.

"If my dying could do Paul any good, I wouldn't mind it," she thought, burying her

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face against an Indian red cushion, pleasantly suggestive of tobacco. "There's a poem in that somewhere," she added; for the literary habit is strong even *in extremis*.

Paul put a cushion under her feet, then stood smiling down on her.

"This would make a good scene for 'Alfaretta, the Little Slave Girl,'" he suggested. "Out of the Storm; the White Face against the Window—"

"Eight stories up," commented Donna. "Think what a neck she'd have to have!" They both laughed.

"The villain is close upon her track," Paul went on. "There is barely time to conceal her before a loud knock—"

Knuckles on the studio door at that instant made them both jump. Before they could collect their wits, Floyd walked in.

"Say, Paul—" he began impetuously, then, seeing Donna, stopped short, the color rushing into his face. Both men were so plainly disconcerted that Donna felt suddenly uncomfortable and out of place.

"I had the blues and Paul had been cheering me up," she explained awkwardly. "I was just going."

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"Oh, it's early," Paul said rather mechanically.

"I must," she insisted, struggling to her feet. She saw the two exchange glances full of some meaning she could not divine, and wondered uncomfortably what plans her presence had upset.

"Donna, I want to walk home with you," said Ffloyd, with the solemnity of one who had just formed a high purpose.

"Oh, it isn't necessary. It is early yet. Really, Lorrimer, I don't want you," she protested, and looked appealingly at Paul, but he would not meet her eyes.

"Please let me. I want to," Ffloyd repeated even more gravely.

"Very well," she said helplessly. "Good night, Paul. Thank you."

"Good night," he said, and held her hand warmly for a moment with a smile of encouragement that puzzled and hurt her.

"I might have had just this one evening with him," she thought rebelliously. "But he didn't even try to keep me. Oh, I wish Lorrimer Ffloyd were in Jericho!"

Ffloyd, meanwhile, was helping her in and out of the elevator and opening swing doors

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for her in a way that would have amazed her if she had not been too troubled to notice it. He usually left her to perform these minor services for herself, but to-night he felt strangely protective. The traces of tears on her face and her evident confusion at seeing him had touched him deeply. Donna certainly was a dear girl. He drew her arm through his and closed his fingers over her hand, and Donna, suddenly ashamed of her resentment, and remembering only the years of warm friendship between them, met the advance cordially.

"I had a bad day, too," he said. "How's it all going to come out, little girl?"

"O Lorrimer, I don't know!" she exclaimed. "I don't feel as if I could bear it much longer," she added in a lower tone.

"I don't believe you'll have to, my dear," he said with deep meaning. "Only, one has to be very sure, doesn't one? Is there anything to do but—wait a little?"

"I must have told more than I realized," she said with a faint smile. "I didn't mean to bother any one with it. But it's the waiting that's killing me. If I—oh!" She broke off

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with a cry of fright and shrank up against Ffloyd, clinging to his arm.

"What is it?" he exclaimed.

He saw nothing but a brown and white dog sniffing at the lamp-post.

"That's the dog!" she cried. "Oh, I am afraid!"

A boy came up at that moment and whistled sharply to the dog. Donna turned to him excitedly.

"Take hold of him—hold him tight," she implored. "That's the dog that bit me—and you are the boy who said he had been shot!" She released the startled Ffloyd as the dog settled down in evident amity, sweeping the pavement with his tail. "What did you mean?" she asked sternly.

"But he ain't a cross dog," the boy said unhappily. "We keep him in the back yard all the time now, and he never bit no one before, didger, Petey?" The dog beamed and flourished his tail harder than ever.

"But you said he was mad," Donna insisted.

"Yes'm, that was all. You hit his bone with your foot and he was awful hungry, so he just bit before he thought. Any dog would get mad if you hit his bone away."

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"Oh!" said Donna. A whole world of dread and misery seemed to roll away with that long breath.

"Donna, what does this mean?" demanded Ffloyd for the third time.

"Father says if you complain or anything, he'll have Petey killed," the boy went on, rubbing the stubby head that was nosing his leg. "We—we've had him five years, since he was a little puppy." The dog rose and began to paw his jacket, making long passes with his tongue at the troubled face above. "Can you resist that?" the boy's eyes said plainly. And Donna could not.

"Well, keep him out of mischief," she said. "Good night." She turned happily to Ffloyd as they went on.

"Wasn't it funny?" she laughed. "He used 'mad' in the vernacular and I in the literal, and out of that I've had hours of pitch black horror. Oh, I'm so hungry! I had no dinner. Have you any money?"

Over a supper table she told him all about the past week. He took it very soberly. "And that was all that was troubling you?" he asked finally.

"Well, surely it was enough!" she ex-

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claimed. "But I shan't worry any more. Of course it is all right now."

"Oh, of course," he assented, staring dismally at his plate.

"Well, you seem disappointed," she protested. Then she laughed. "O Lorrimer, think what copy I have stored up! I've learned a great deal about human emotions."

"Yes; I think I've learned a little something, too," he said with a long sigh,

CHAPTER IV.

LORRIMER BECOMES A FAD.

A CARICATURE of a certain celebrity, bearing the now expensive signature of Lorrimer Ffloyd, led to unforeseen consequences. The Celebrity shook with laughter over the picture, not because it is proper to laugh when one is caricatured, but because it struck him as being intensely funny. He awoke in the night to laugh at it, and in the morning he showed it to his daughter. Miss Celebrity, who was a personage, was at that particular moment tired of all the men she knew, and much in need of a new sensation. Consequently, a week later Ffloyd was sitting on the other side of her tea table at five in the afternoon, and she was not at home to any one else.

At first he was difficult, very close to rude; for the footmen had unnerved him, and he resented this weakness so bitterly that some one must be punished for it at once. But Miss

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Celebrity knew her business. She handled him as deftly as she did the tea urn, and by the time the water came to a boil he had yielded up his resentment and was doing exactly what she wished. When he left, an hour later, there was a pencil caricature of himself on the linen tray cloth, and a stinging excitement in his veins that carried him past the footmen as if they had been plaster casts.

"So she finds her life monotonous, does she?" he said to himself with a triumphant laugh. "Well, I'll see that she gets a sensation or two before we finish!"

Miss Celebrity, meanwhile, was smiling somewhat obscurely to herself in the tiny elevator that was carrying her to her own part of the house.

"He will do," she concluded; "yes, he will do very well—at any rate, until Gerard comes back."

The others first knew of this adventure into new worlds at one of Charlotte's suppers soon after, when Floyd appeared in frock coat and a top hat, and all the hither despised trappings of a Fifth Avenue Sunday. There was a chorus of amazement.

"What does it all mean?" Charlotte finally

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demanded, while Cameron circled around him in pantomimic admiration.

"Why, I have simply been calling. Is there anything so outlandish in my appearance?" Ffloyd spoke impatiently. Their somewhat noisy excitement irritated him. They might at least behave as if they were used to well bred surroundings.

"Those are not such clothes as toast is made in," Donna said gravely. "Charlotte, I'll do it—though it isn't my turn." And she lit the gas stove, chanting in friendly derision:

"Oh, I love society, high society, *real* society!"

That frock coat dominated the whole evening. And yet they were used to elaborate toilets on the part of Lanse, accepting them as a matter of course. Perhaps the fact that Lanse himself was used to them made the difference. Ffloyd was in an unnatural state, mentally as well as bodily. The tea table he had just left had spoiled his appetite in more ways than one, for the glamour of Miss Celebrity's presence and surroundings had affected him like first wine, and the reaction now left him cold and bitter, with raw nerves.

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"Well, are we going to hear about it?" Charlotte insisted as she began to serve things.

"Why, there's nothing to hear," he answered with an effort. "I did a picture of a man, and got acquainted with his daughter. She is rather worth while." And he mentioned the great name casually, as if it were a mere Smith or Brown—a violation of his real attitude that was contrary to all the codes of Us.

"And to think," said Donna in mock awe, "that he was once just Thomas L. Floyd, of Metuchen! Floyd with one f, too! Oh, if she ever finds it out!"

"Suppose we write her an anonymous letter," suggested Lanse.

But Floyd declined to be amused, declined to eat, declined to talk except in an abstract, distant way. When they laughed out, his controlled smile made them feel boisterous. Charlotte, telling a story with the whole souled abandon that was so potent a charm in her, telling it with wonderful mimicry, so that the scene and characters were vividly present, was suddenly smitten in the midst of it with the consciousness that she was thirty-five, the mother of a nearly grown son, and perhaps—It was the first time such a thought had ever

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occurred to her, and though she was too young and alive for it to last more than a moment, it spoiled her story and left a little mark between her eyebrows.

When the others had gone, rather earlier than usual, she turned to Paul, who always lingered.

"What was the matter? Why was it all so horrid?" she asked.

"Oh, it's just that Ffloyd is drunk," he answered. "He will come through it all right—it had to happen, sooner or later. It's the final step of his education."

The irritation smoothed out of her face, and she looked at him affectionately.

"Paul, you are the wisest person in the whole world," she said seriously.

"Don't," he protested. "If I were that, I'd go home; and I want to stay."

The next Sunday night Ffloyd did not come, but sent an apologetic note explaining that it was a dinner, and that as people were asked to meet him, he could not very well cut it. The Sunday after he arrived late, but in hilarious spirits, and kept things going at a half hysterical pitch that left them all exhausted. Then for three weeks he was not seen or heard of,

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'At the end of that time he dropped into Donna's apartment late one afternoon. He looked intangibly changed. It took her some minutes to make out the differences—the hair a couple of inches longer than normal, the eccentric waistcoat, the bursting carnation upside down in his buttonhole, the elaborate scarf apparently held in place by a shingle nail.

"How is the lady?" she asked with friendly directness. Floyd smiled to himself as one having remarkable memories.

"She likes your verses, Donna," he said. "I gave her our animal book, and she wanted to know about you."

It was impossible not to feel flattered at this announcement, it was given in such calm certainty of its importance. Donna's gratification lasted several seconds, before her sense of humor rose to the occasion.

"And what did you tell her?" she asked.

"That you were young, beautiful, and accomplished; intensely clever, yet intensely feminine; one of the nicest girls I ever knew, to work with or to play with."

Donna smiled a little wickedly.

"Well, and did it work? Was she jealous?"

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she suggested. He gave her a shrewd glance.

"You are too clever for your own good," he admitted with a laugh. "It's an awfully interesting game," he went on confidentially. "They can't understand a man's daring to be himself, to follow his impulses even if they are fantastic." He straightened the shingle nail in his scarf. "Of course she's the only one that is really worth while. The rest haven't got brains and understanding, as she has; but it's good fun all round, just to see their excitement. They say things are 'Ffloydy' now, when they're odd. Isn't it queer that society is so easy?"

"I suppose it is," said Donna a little shortly. Ffloyd was not used to disapproval in his new rôle, and resented her lack of sympathy. There were others to appreciate him, if she did not. He rose soon after, and she made no effort to keep him, though she gave him a troubled look as she said good by.

"Donna takes things too seriously," he said to himself with a shrug. "It's tiresome to be always on a high plane." Nevertheless, his hand went up once or twice to his buttonhole, where the bursting carnation was hung head down. He walked along somewhat moodily,

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not noticing what went on about him until his name spoken between two laughs brought him back with a start. A victoria holding two women had drawn up beside the curb, and from its puffy blue cushions Miss Celebrity was summoning him in that odd little hot-house voice of hers that made all others sound untrained and offensively hearty. Ffloyd took off his hat with a movement he had invented especially for her, and had named the "Gladys."

"I give other people the 'Miss Johnson,' or the 'Miss de Vere' or the 'Hello, Edy,'" he had explained; "but the 'Gladys' is just especially for you—a refined blending of respect and intimacy."

"You are a most adorable little lunatic," she had replied tolerantly.

"We wish to be seen speaking to you," she now explained.

"To prove you aren't exclusive?" Ffloyd asked, leaning his elbow on the broad wheel guard. The other girl gave a laugh of protest. "If you want to be amused," he went on, "you've got the wrong number. I was just deciding to give up my career as a social fad

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and go back to the pastime of earning my living."

"Oh, but we can't spare you," Miss Celebrity declared, leaning forward a little. "Why, I am thinking of giving a costume dinner, just because I know you would wear something so—so Ffloydy, you know." She smiled down at him, and he was back again, body and soul, his momentary discontent a thing to be scorned and forgotten. "Come to-morrow afternoon and help me plan it," she added, leaning back again with a bow of dismissal.

"You don't mean to say," demanded Ffloyd, "that you've kept me here all this while and aren't going to ask me to drive home with you?"

"Well, really, this seat will hardly hold three," she objected.

"What's the matter with this, then?" And he seated himself at their feet, his own resting on the low step.

"Very well—if you are comfortable," she assented.

"Now, I object!" exclaimed the other girl. "You may be considered spoilt, and he may be considered mad, but I am not considered any-

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thing interesting, and I have to keep up appearances. I will not have it."

Ffloyd leaned back and protested volubly, apparently quite unconscious of anything conspicuous in his position. Only once he looked disconcerted for a second, and caught off his hat rather confusedly to some one who stared at him in grave wonder as she nodded.

"I should call that the 'Hello, Edy,' " suggested Miss Celebrity, meeting his eyes as he rose. He laughed, but did not explain; and Charlotte went home saying to herself, "Oh, dear me! How long must it last?"

They planned a costume dinner, and then they added a fancy dress ball, and by the time the invitations were out, it promised to be a very elaborate occasion.

"People hate dressing up, but they would hate worse not to come," said Miss Celebrity, with the tranquil assurance that so fascinated Ffloyd. He had given up even the pretense of working now, and the "year in Paris" fund for which he had labored so earnestly was reduced to a bare month in New York by clothes, hansom, entertainments, and offerings for the lady.

"For a man who is always bragging of his

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poverty—" she commented when he came in with a great church candelabrum of wrought brass nearly as tall as himself under each arm.

"*'Mais quel geste!'*" he quoted with Cyrano's own magnificence as he set them down on either side of the tea table. "I walked up with them (if I had taken a cab, I could only have given you one), and Wattie Van Court nearly fell out of the club window trying to see what they were. I think he decided they were the latest thing in walking sticks, and went down to get some at once."

"It is a responsible position, to be a leader of fads," she warned him. "On Sunday I saw seven men with carnations upside down in their buttonholes. It is time for something new. Remember, I trust you to make my party the most talked of one of the century."

Ffloyd was ready early on the night of the dinner, but he was careful to arrive the last of all. The drawing-room was brilliant with personages—Lady Macbeth, Folly, Cromwell, Sir Galahad, the usual collection of Queen Louise of Prussias—seventeen altogether, with Miss Celebrity resplendent as the Princess Scheherezade. When the portières were drawn back and "Mr. Lorrimer Ffloyd"

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was announced, every one stopped talking and turned towards the door. There was a half second of suspense, then, as Ffloyd appeared between the curtains, a burst of laughter, a clapping of hands, an eager coming forward of knights and queens.

"And this was once Thomas L. Floyd of Metuchen," flashed through his mind as he bowed his greetings. His costume was plain enough, but it had taken even better than he had dared to hope, for he was simply made up to represent his own well known caricature of himself.

He turned to speak to the Princess Scheherazade, and they shouted again at his profile aspect—the long, pointed nose, exaggerated glasses, and clinging, dank hair of the familiar cartoon. Even the nervous haste of his pictured movements was reproduced by a clever wiring of his garments. The princess smiled on him and gave him both hands.

"I knew you would do it," she said; "I knew I could trust you for a sensation."

Ffloyd took her hands and bowed over them wordlessly. A stinging excitement was flashing through all his veins; the year in Paris was well lost, his work well forgotten, his old

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world well left behind. It was perhaps the gayest moment of his whole life, this instant of triumph with the princess smiling at him and all her world applauding.

The dinner went off brilliantly. Ffloyd was in mad spirits, but kept his head and played his game with caution, dimly realizing that his princess would not easily forgive a false move. His excitement roused an abandon in the others that spread from them through the whole ball afterwards, so that it went with a swing and gaiety that is generally crushed out of large affairs.

Towards the end he went and stood before his hostess, mutely.

"Well?" she asked.

"Haven't I been good?" he began.

"Good as gold."

"And I helped make your party a success?"

"You did. You were the belle of the evening."

"And you like me?"

"Oh—perhaps."

"Well, then, don't I get a little five minutes of royal society, all to myself? Haven't I earned it?"

She laughed indulgently and let him lead

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her away to a quieter neighborhood where there was a divan down behind friendly palms.

"Well?" she queried, leaning back among the cushions. "How are you going to amuse me?" He rested his elbows on his knees and looked at her meditatively over his clasped hands.

"I've been amusing you for weeks and weeks," he answered. "Don't you think it is only fair you should amuse me for a few moments?"

"But I never amuse people. I don't know how," she protested lazily.

"That's because you are what novels used to call 'a spoiled beauty.'"

"And what would they call me now?" she asked.

"I know what I should like to call you—but I don't dare. You always keep me a little afraid of you, princess," he added wistfully, picking up one of the gold tassels of her gown and gently beating her hand with it.

"Why won't you let me come nearer?"

"Indeed, I think you are quite near enough," she returned with a faint shrug, moving her hand away.

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"But I feel as if I were only your monte-bank," he persisted. "I don't want that. I want—" He broke off and searched her eyes with his own. She gave him a cool, level glance that he could not decipher, then looked off down the brilliant rooms. A man in ordinary evening dress was working his way toward them, evidently looking for some one. They watched him until he was near their corner, then she rose quietly and went to meet him.

"Well, Gerard," Ffloyd heard her say, "when did you get back?"

"Two hours ago," was the answer. "I hadn't any costume to wear, but I knew you would forgive me."

"Come and have some supper," she said, laying her hand on his arm. Then she looked back with a smile of apology to Ffloyd, a look that left him very contented. It did not occur to him that its friendliness might not be due to him at all. He felt only a patronizing pity for the fellow who had to pass in his every day plainness where every one else was beautiful or fantastic.

"He must feel so out of it," he concluded comfortably.

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When he went to say good night, the plain clothes man was still with her.

"When may I come to-morrow?" Ffloyd asked confidentially over her hand. She lifted her eyebrows.

"Oh, really—I don't believe I shall be at home to-morrow at all," she said, disposing of him with a little nod and turning back to her companion.

Ffloyd felt himself turn white under his make-up; a dull chill crept down his arms and through his whole body, and his brain felt suddenly numb. It was not until he was lying back in a corner of his cab that the blood rushed up into his face, and he knew how hurt he was. He went to bed with a shrug and an attempted laugh, but it was a night of angry movements, of proud, cutting speeches spoken half aloud in the darkness, of quick, hard breathings and sudden stoppages of his ears with desperate hands.

"Oh, I can do without you," he said fiercely. "You've neither heart nor soul. I hate your little frosty, affected voice, and your snobbish conceit, and your—God, I wish I'd never seen you!"

It was not until the next afternoon that the

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inevitable reaction came. Perhaps she had not really meant it the way it sounded. She was tired, and he ought to have realized that she would not want visitors the day after such an effort. His absurd sensitiveness had taken offense where none was intended. He would go to see her on Sunday afternoon just as usual and then, if she was friendly and others gave them a chance, he would tell her what she had made him suffer, and she would be grieved as well as surprised. He planned out just what she would say, to his entire satisfaction.

He went through many different stages of feeling during the next few days, but the glamour was round him again, and he excused and forgave her for the sake of going back. On Sunday afternoon he pressed her bell at the usual time, with a few casual sentences in his mouth and his heart in his throat. The footmen were so much furniture to him now in his greater dread.

She was seated at her tea table with the man she had called Gerard beside her. About a dozen people were scattered through the great room. He saw with an inner sinking that the candelabra she had coveted and he had discovered for her were no longer by the table.

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"That's Lorrimer Ffloyd, you know," he heard some one say, and the whisper gave him courage to go on. She lifted her eyes and glanced at him carelessly.

"Ah, good afternoon," she said. "Tea? Amy, come and give Mr. Ffloyd a cup of tea. I am tired of posing as domestic." She rose and crossed over to a deep window seat, the new man following her. Ffloyd talked brilliantly, if a trifle incoherently, to the girl who took her place. He was more "Ffloydy" than usual the rest of the afternoon, but those about laughed guardedly, evidently unwilling to let themselves go, and they talked more to one another than to him. They had seen his cool reception, and were visibly drawing back. Last Sunday, when she had kept him beside her all the afternoon, his least word had started little ripples of laughter, and he had been wreathed and laureled with their approval. Now they were afraid. "As rats leave a sinking ship," he said desperately to himself.

To be sure, one or two whom he had always ignored as second rate made furtive advances to him, evidently hoping to profit by his reverse. But he turned hotly from the oppor-

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tunity. He was not going to take up with second best now.

"Another royal favorite turned down," one man commented to another, and, though Ffloyd did not hear the speech, he saw it, and felt its meaning. He was too proud to go, so he held on valiantly, and they had no least suspicion that they were in the room with such suffering as the deepest tragedies of their lives might not cause them.

When, at last, he was back in his own room, he called in his philosophy, and then his sense of humor, to the aid of his poor, bleeding vanity, and even pulled out some work, whistling defiantly. And then it suddenly occurred to him that this was Sunday night, and Charlotte was even now making the salad, laughing her splendid laugh at Paul's wit and Cameron's absurdity, while Donna helped to get things ready, and Lanse and Evelyn grew flushed and excited over the interminable play in a corner.

"They are my kind. They are the real thing for me," he said, pushing back his sketches. "I never could say 'Us' in any other set. And I threw them over the first chance I had!"

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Such a homesickness for the little flat swept over him that tears came into his eyes, and he threw himself face down on the narrow bed. He longed for their simplicity, their kind hearts and honest intentions and keen wits, their gaiety and their earnestness. Above all, he wanted Donna. And he had cut himself off from it all! For long, bitter hours he lay there, mastering his lesson.

The next morning at nine o'clock Floyd let himself into his workroom. The air was close and stale, and dust lay thick everywhere. He put things in order with his precise, neat movements, then prepared his pencils, and sat down before his drawing board. He had paid his rent that morning, and the remaining fifteen cents had gone for his breakfast. He had to earn his luncheon and dinner, if he was to have any.

An unexpected exhilaration crept through him at the prospect. The pencil between his fingers brought back the forgotten joy of work, and the listlessness faded from his eyes. After a few moments he began to sketch with quick, nervous movements. Soon his coat came off, his cuff was pushed back, his forehead grew intent, and he worked with grow-

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ing excitement, stopping only to note down the ideas that came crowding in upon him; for, without knowing it, he had begun the series of cartoons that was to carry him triumphantly into all the magazine fastnesses, and to turn the coveted months in Paris into years—"Mr. Gosbek's Career as a Fad."

By noon the series was outlined and the first sketch practically done; and all the bitterness and the misery were worked away. He was restored to his own kind and people. He could laugh now, and he could let the world laugh with him, for he had the upper hand. He had found himself.

When the whistles blew he put away his work and hurried to Donna's apartment. It was evidently one of her domestic days, for an odor of toast greeted him as she opened the door. She had an apron over her gown and a fork in her hand.

"Donna," he said, "I haven't a cent in the world, but I've got a bully idea, and if you will give me something to eat, I'll tell you about it."

She laughed gladly, seeing at a glance that, whatever the cause, Floyd had come to himself again. An omelet was made on the gas

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stove, and stores were brought out of the cupboard, and they talked shop and laughed and grew excited, just as they had always done. Her unconscious voice, warm and spontaneous, thrilled him indescribably. It was a home coming that made all those wretched hours worth while. When he said good-by he took both her hands and beat them softly together, looked straight into her friendly eyes.

"Donnie, I've been drunk, plain drunk," he said. "It went to my head. But what else could you expect of a person who began as Thomas L. Floyd, of Metuchen?"

"Well, you got 'Mr. Gosbek' out of it," she suggested.

"I got something better than that," he said, turning away. "Good-by, little girl!"

CHAPTER V.

"MR. GOSBEK'S CAREER."

N EARLY every Sunday afternoon Cameron climbed up to Lorrimer Ffloyd's bare attic of a workroom to see if there were any new cartoons for him to roar over. He was a most satisfactory patron of humorous art; not a stroke of irony, not a waggish curve, escaped him, and before the best of them he would laugh himself into great sobs, pounding his thighs, trying to gasp out the wording of the point on which he was so deliciously impaled, but seldom getting beyond, "But he—but he—but—oh, I shall die!" The unconsciousness of the tribute made it doubly endearing. It never occurred to Cameron that Ffloyd, bent down over his drawing board, with only a dry twist of a smile at one corner of his mouth, was nevertheless eagerly watching for the verdict of his delight. The boy did not dream of forcing his appreciation, or, indeed, of considering Ffloyd at all in the matter. He came

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because he adored a funny picture and because Ffloyd's were, of course, the funniest in the world; and he never suspected why the week's work was not sent off till after Sunday, or wondered that Ffloyd was seldom or never out on that afternoon of leisure. They frequently fell into long talks, afterwards, and the naïve faith with which Cameron asked and listened was a new and touching experience to the solitary man. Ffloyd was fond of describing himself as "the cat who walked by his lone, waving his wild tail," and he wilfully kept away casual friendships; but he was defenseless against the simplicity of this boy's admiration. More and more he watched for his coming and laid traps to keep him. Sometimes, after Cameron had gone, a great, primitive quickening came upon him, undoing the ordered bleakness of his outer life, and bringing him to the impatient declaration:

"I want a son—Good God, I want a son!"

Ffloyd was secretive about his work until it was finished, profoundly irritated if others knew or questioned him upon its subject. In the first glow or doubt of an idea, he usually hurried to Donna, but after that even she did not venture near the topic until invited. The

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historic Monday that gave him “Mr. Gosbek’s Career as a Fad” was followed by weeks of silent and merciless labor. He was utterly out of money; and though any editor would have given him large sums down at a hint of the series, Ffloyd would have starved rather than thrust the newborn idea naked into the world. So he did pot boilers and filled orders, working night as well as day, and offering these for Cameron’s amusement at his Sunday visits. It was hard, sometimes, to wait for the excitement that must greet “Mr. Gosbek”; but he was too jealous for the series as a whole to borrow any laughter ahead. He felt that it was good: that here, at last, was a worthy satire, worthily—even perfectly—done, and that the hour of big success was at hand. He walked in a dream these days, and inspiration burned like a torch behind the minute patience of his cramped hand and bent body.

It was a Saturday night when the last stroke was made, and Sunday morning was a long fever of expectation. A lover could not have awaited his lady more eagerly than Ffloyd awaited Cameron’s first great laugh. When his usual hour approached, Ffloyd laid the sketches in a careless pile on the table, and,

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getting out a portfolio of old studies and first draughts, took one at random and pretended to go to work on it. Cameron's knock made his heart leap and quiver like a frightened rabbit.

"Come," he called, then added a brief "Hello!" being apparently too busy to lift his eyes from the drawing board.

"Lo," returned Cameron cheerfully. "Thought I'd drop in. Any new pictures?"

Ffloyd dipped his head towards the long table with a careless, "U'm-h'm." For a breathless moment he waited for the opening chord, the first growing chuckle of appreciation; then, stealing a swift glance, he saw with dismay that Cameron had fallen on the open portfolio, not noticing the unpretentious pile of new work. He took breath to speak, but closed his lips again and settled grimly to the task of waiting. That old truck would not hold the boy long. As Cameron, leaning on his elbows, giggled comfortably at his discoveries, smiling lines of anticipation appeared about Ffloyd's eyes, but he did not look round, even when a boyish roar of delight was followed by a rather long silence. He was too

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intent on the coming triumph to wonder or care what might be in the old portfolio.

After the silence had lasted several moments, Cameron straightened up. "Well, I must be going," he said. There was constraint under his manful carelessness, but Floyd did not notice.

"Just take a look at that series I have done," he suggested, and turned away again as Cameron obeyed. He heard the first sheet lifted, and allowed for a pause while the lines beneath were being read. Perhaps he had not written them clearly; or his impatience could not take a proper measure of time—the laugh was so long in coming. Not one of them was funnier than that first, more delicately witty, more crammed with mocking human truth. Yet the applause still held off. There was a second rustle, and a third, and at last he had to look.

Cameron was taking up the pictures in swift succession, and not a flicker of a smile showed in his face. Sick at heart, Floyd watched him go through to the very end, then lay them down with a smothered sigh.

"Very funny," he said baldly, and turned away. "I must be off."

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With the doorknob in his hand and his back turned, he added a difficult, "Oh, I say—will you tell my mother that I won't be home to supper?" Something further about "one of the fellows" trailed after him as he closed the door.

Floyd's bitter disappointment at first took the form of wrath. He had cast his pearls before swine; the great lout could enjoy nothing above the level of slapstick. But this was so notoriously untrue that presently he had to give it up, and his anger went with it, leaving him cold and desolate. He forced himself to take up the sketches, one by one, and, in the chilly light of his disappointment, he saw truly at last. They were obvious, dull, commonplace: neither in idea nor in execution was there a touch of the distinction that he had dreamed into them. They would sell, no doubt—poor, ordinary trash often did; but not one inch could they add to his stature, and his career would end as it had begun, with cartoons of big-bodied politicians and clumsy allegories on parties and trusts. No house of cards ever fell more prostrate than Floyd's many sided hopes of the past few weeks. He sat staring at the ruins until the wintry dusk

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added its desolating touch, then, starting up, he seized the last sketch and deliberately tore it across. It was his intention to serve the whole series so, but at the sound of tearing his heart failed him, and he flung them into a drawer.

"That's over," he said aloud, as the drawer slammed. "Well, then!"

Having accepted failure, Ffloyd was impatient to commit himself to it, to leave no room for future delusions about his career. He saw truly, once for all, and, proudly, hotly, he prepared to abide by the bleak vision. The means to his end lay at his hand: a fifth letter had come the day before from a glaring Sunday newspaper, desiring to buy him, body and soul. He re-read the offer, facing what it meant with savage satisfaction, as though he punished an enemy by accepting. Three years of colored supplements, crude, coarse, funny to the child of the slums or the foreign-born boor, three years of merciless persecution by caricature of all whom the paper hated, without regard to cause or creed: it was a heavy sentence, but Ffloyd did not hesitate. Having written his acceptance in his usual

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neat, precise hand, he sealed it and carried it down to the dark street.

He had not meant to go to Charlotte's; yet, once out in the Sunday night emptiness of the city, it was easier to turn that way than to decide what to do with his wounded, sullen self. He had no intention of telling his new move. He must have time to achieve a proper flippancy before he met their grave dismay.

He found Charlotte alone, hovering about her supper table, and the seven places reminded him of her son's message. She received it with bewilderment.

"But Cameron was home not fifteen minutes ago," she protested. "I heard him come in and then go out again. Why didn't he tell me himself?"

"Perhaps he thought that you were out," suggested Ffloyd, wandering about the room and wondering impatiently why he had come.

"No—I called and he answered." Charlotte was troubled. "He couldn't suppose I would interfere with his going, if it was—if it wasn't—" She stood with one hand pressing her cheek, frowning anxiously at possibilities. "O Lorrimer, at what age does a boy begin to do what?"

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"Depends," was the heavy answer.

"It is so unlike him: he always tells everything he knows! How did he seem when he gave you the message?"

"Constrained, rather. Kept his back turned." Ffloyd was not softening facts to-day.

"Oh, dear, I don't like it!" Then, as the doorbell rang, she passed a smoothing hand across her forehead. "Don't say anything to the others," she added hastily. "Of course, it is all right. Let them in, Lorrimer."

She had not noticed Ffloyd's depression, and though he had meant to hide it, he felt hurt and neglected as he obeyed. The others, coming in with fresh cold on their garments, bright cheeks and quickened voices, seemed to bring a mocking air of success with their gaiety. He stood aloof, and answered greetings with brief sounds that had little welcome in them. They were indignant at the news of Cameron's defection.

"If that isn't just like a horrid boy," Donna protested; "to prefer some little scrub of a schoolmate to Us!"

"We don't make it interesting enough for him," said Paul worriedly. "He fits in so per-

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fectly, we forget what a kid he is. I don't mind admitting to you, Charlotte, that before he came I had my doubts."

"Doubts! I had my certainties," said Donna with a laugh. "I thought he would be dreadfully in the way, myself."

Charlotte was smiling over the implication. "I know. I understood, of course. But he really hasn't been a bother, has he?"

"Bother?" It was a general protest. "I never really knew what a wit I was till I heard Cameron's laugh," Paul added. Lanse sighed.

"I never before met any one who would listen to the entire plot of a four-act play, and then ask for more details," he explained. "I was planning to try one on him tonight."

"Cameron is the element we needed—the perfect listener," Donna said thoughtfully, "Evelyn listens, but one isn't quite sure what she is thinking, down behind her pretty manners." The two smiled at each other. "But what Cameron is thinking is written on every line of his blessed face."

"The dear old boy!" Charlotte's eyes were warm to mistiness. "Lanse, pull his chair back; I can't bear to see it empty. Donna,

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do you and Lorrimer want to toast the muffins? Everything else is ready."

"We do," Donna assented for them both. Ffloyd followed her passively to the gas stove and let her place the muffins over its two burners without interference or advice. She sent a keen, friendly glance into his face. "What is wrong, Lorrimer?" she asked.

He deliberated before answering.

"I have looked into a crystal and seen my own future," he said at last.

"And was it so dreadful?"

"That depends on the point of view. I shall probably be quite satisfied with it, in time."

She puzzled over his meaning, still not sure how seriously to take him, but inclined to smile.

"Well, you will have Us, anyway," she offered consolingly. "We are all in your future, aren't we?"

"No," was the dry answer.

"None of us?"

"Not one."

Her mouth took a grave line. "Why not?"

"Because it is so written."

"Lorrimer! I don't like you tonight!"

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"I am sorry." It was the chilliest of snubs, but Donna did not resent it. She had always an indulgence that was almost maternal for Ffloyd's difficult nature.

"You couldn't do without us, my dear," she said gently. "You would come back—waving your wild tail, if you like! But you would come."

He tried to keep silent, but Paul's voice reached them at that moment, and some reflection of it in Donna's face, a half unconscious turn of her head, set loose a dark resentment never before even acknowledged.

"If Paul committed all the seven deadly sins, he would still hold exactly the same place with you," he said with biting distinctness; "while, for an error in taste, I should be cast out forever."

She was still patient with him, though she looked startled. "Why do you say that?"

"Isn't it true?"

"About Paul? Yes, of course. But not——"

"Donna! Something is burning!" called Charlotte.

There was a guilty start and a sound of hasty scraping. Donna finished in silence,

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then put the plate into Ffloyd's hand with a smile.

"Everybody loves everybody, Lorry," she said affectionately. "Cheer up and be good." He turned away with a scowl.

Charlotte, presiding over the supper table, appeared her usual serene, gay self; but Ffloyd would lend himself to no such histrionics. He ate in gloomy silence. Friendly attempts to cheer him were blankly ignored, raillery was met with a muffled "H'h!" of contempt.

"Oh, isn't it lovely to be a man," Donna broke out, after an amused attempt to penetrate to his shrouded attention. "It is so regal, someway, to be cross at a party. No woman ever would."

"She would be too vain," said Lanse.

"Too socially conscientious," Donna amended. "She feels that the party must be a success, no matter what it costs her. Now Lorrimer Ffloyd doesn't feel that way at all."

Lorrimer paid no attention, but Paul came to his aid.

"Well, there is something to be said for Ffloyd's way. We don't have to strain our intuitions, keeping up with him. We are certain that, if he is bothered about anything, he

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will jolly well let us know it." And he shot a glance at Charlotte, so keen that a guilty smile betrayed her.

"But do we always want to know it?" objected Lanse.

"Exactly!" Donna assented. "I much prefer the worm kept in the bud, myself, unless there is something active I can do for it."

Cameron would not have let so graphic an opening pass unimproved, and the pause that followed stood for him so vividly that they scolded Charlotte again for his defection. The suppressed anxiety crept into her face as she protested her helplessness.

"He is paying us back for not quite wanting him before he came," said Donna. "Lorrimer, did you ever show Charlotte that wicked sketch you did? Have you kept it?"

Ffloyd glanced up at the question, at first absently, then with a growing fixity; the startled wonder in his face changed to dismayed certainty as he slowly laid down his knife and fork.

"Well, by Jove!" he muttered.

"What? What is it?" they insisted. Still he stared, a gleam of excitement lighting his moody eyes.

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"Oh, I wonder, I wonder!" he exclaimed, starting up from the table. A moment later, they heard the front door bang after him.

"He is quite mad, but never mind," said Donna, breaking the surprised silence. "We can spare him tonight!"

Ffloyd's quarters were only a few blocks distant, and he ran all the way. Plunging into his workroom, he lit a light and, without waiting to get his breath, shook out the contents of the old portfolio on the table. Yes, there it was, the bitter sketch showing the bored six gathered about the obnoxious infant; and no date on it to show that it had been done before the boy himself came and belonged to them. No wonder the laughter had been knocked out of Cameron, that sorry afternoon! In his relief, Ffloyd could have cried over the boy's hurt and his manful reticence.

"The dear old kid!" he muttered, and stood staring about for a way to right matters. A moment later he had spread out a fresh sheet and was furiously at work. The same figures were dashed in, only now they were all eager, imploring, stretching out begging hands to a glorious youth who was stepping debon-

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nairely out of the door, with a careless backward wave to the group. The first picture was labeled, "As we thought it would be," and dated; under the date of the second he wrote, "As it is." With a chuckle of satisfaction, he started to his feet, but at the door hesitated, then turned to a table drawer. "Mr. Gosbek's Career" also went with him.

He walked more slowly, returning, looking about him with alert, happy eyes. He tried not to hope, but that grim revelation, which he had called True Sight, was mercifully leaving him; his arm tightened excitedly against "Mr. Gosbek." There might still be a chance!

A dreary little restaurant, one of the few open on Sundays, attracted his attention by breathing hot cakes at him. He had eaten almost nothing all day, and he paused, tempted, and wondering if Charlotte's supper were over. Then he drew hastily back from the doorway, for, alone at a long marble table, sat Cameron, hunched down over his plate, his dejected head resting on one hand. Floyd knew now with pained certainty how he had been hurt, and longed to go to him, but turned and went slowly on. For there was no phase

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of wounded pride that Ffloyd did not understand; and he knew that the boy would shrink from discovery, would hate being hunted up and appeased. It was Ffloyd at his dearest and sunniest who came back to Charlotte's, making them all shout with his two sketches. "Mr. Gosbek" was left concealed under his coat.

Cameron had had a bad time since he came on the forgotten sketch that afternoon. At first glance the unmistakable figures with their exaggerated boredom had struck him as enchantingly funny; then it had dawned on him that the infant in the center was significantly clothed in a Cameron plaid. His laughter ended as he looked more closely. The balloon face, into which had been drawn a wicked likeness to Charlotte, was inevitably somewhat like his own. Charlotte had been sketched with her finger on her lips, and her anxious attitude, as well as the listless irritation of the rest, took on a significance which caught the boy in the side like a knife thrust. He stared in wide-eyed misery, trying to find some other explanation, some loophole by which he might escape back to happiness.

He had always been wanted, Welcome

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was, in his eyes, not a special blessing, but the natural air that one breathed in this jolly world. His delightful uncle had wanted him as a pupil, the boys had wanted him in their games and clubs; all those four years, in every letter, while his mother worked her way up to the success that would let her have him back, she had wanted him. Even her wonderful friends had seemed to want him when he came. He had seized on the bright central vacancy of the hearth rug as his natural and rightful position, and had wallowed there, butting his head against his mother's slipper in his affection, or obligingly rolling over when the atmosphere began to "smell like ironing day," as they expressed it; and the others, lounging in the shadow, seemingly grouped about him as much as about the coal fire, had shot their unchecked speech back and forth across him, and had appeared by their laughter and their kind eyes to admit him to their very center and welcome him there. Now this travesty, this goggling baby on the central rug and the naked ennui of the rest, came to him like a horrible revelation. He was really an intrusion, a spoil sport. They did not want him; they only pretended

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to, out of politeness. They had better times without him. A surge of anger followed the first dismayed pain. He would show them! He set his teeth and forced his softening eyes to stare at the sketch until they were hard and bright again. To get away with his hurt undetected was his one thought.

After a long walk, he discovered that he had no money with him, and trudged drearily back again. His mother’s voice and the bright rooms nearly broke down his pride, but he drove himself out. By means of a newspaper, he prolonged his meal until the restaurant was nearly empty, then tried to turn again away from home. But he could not. He must go back, wanted or not wanted. Pride crumbled before sheer homesickness. He would try not to be in the way. His mother wouldn’t hate having him, anyway. The appeal in his eyes, as he climbed the stairs, would have wrung their hearts, could they have seen it and understood.

His heavy step was greeted with calls and laughter. His mother’s relieved,

“Where *have* you been, bad boy?” was drowned under commands to “Look!” as they drew him towards two sketches pinned above

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the mantelpiece. At first glance, he winced and flushed; then went steadily up to them, with Ffloyd's hand on his back.

He did not laugh as much as they had laughed; but as he looked at the two dates and took in the significance of that second grouping, his face lit and warmed and beamed on them until they laughed again at the transformation. Ffloyd, knowing that his guess had been right, grew madly merry; none of their suppers had ever wound up more gaily, though only two know why the atmosphere of the little room was so charged with warmth and radiance.

When all but Donna had gone, and she was reluctantly turning to her wraps, Ffloyd produced "Mr. Gosbek," laying the sketches carelessly on the table before Cameron.

"Have I shown you these?" he asked. Cameron bent eagerly down over the first one.

"Why, no," he said.

There was a moment's pause, while Donna and Charlotte gossiped in the hall. Then a chuckle sounded, followed by a muffled explosion; then a great, cracking laugh was flung straight up to the ceiling, a very yell of joy—the perfect response of Ffloyd's desires.

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The two women came hurrying back, but Cameron could only gasp and heave and smite his great person, and thrust the first sketch into their hands while he dried his eyes and seized the next. Floyd was destined to gain many coveted glories in the years ahead, but success never tasted sweeter than in that half hour, with his own people shaken by laughter and laying excited hands on his shoulders and telling him that he had done it at last. There was no dryness in his response, no baffling concealments; he stood shining on them, drinking in their words, waiting in open joy while they went over and over the work.

"There is one more, but it got torn," he said. "I can mend it." And, taking from his pocket a sealed and stamped letter, he dropped it into the fire.

Donna came and stood beside him as he watched his commitment to failure burn.

"I see a vision of your future, too, Lorri-mer," she said. "But I don't see why it excludes Us. You needn't be as proud as all that."

"What I saw wasn't a vision—it was a bad dream," he said quickly. "It is all over. I see truly now, my dear!"

CHAPTER VI.

A WRITER OF PLAYS.

HAD she been born several centuries earlier, Evelyn would have pinned her favor on her knight's sleeve and assisted him into his armour with steady hands and exalted eyes. He who loved her must excel; and man must know his excellence. Being too late for tourneys, she dispatched a nervous young playwright to face his unsympathizing father with the same imperious ambition. She was fastidious about distinction, as about everything else: for mere money she had a contempt possible only to one who had never lacked it; but the honors won by the brain, by talent and hot imagination, marked, in her eyes, the true aristocracy. When that life was open to a man, she had only impatience for hesitation, no matter what its source.

"You have been your father's son long enough, Lanse," she declared, standing, straight and spirited, before him. "The time has come when you must be yourself."

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It was significant of their intimacy that Lanse, the supremely well mannered, kept his seat, looking up at her with worried intentness.

"But what if I can't do it, Evelyn? What if we are mistaken in thinking that I have talent?"

"Oh, if you are going to talk that way——" She turned away from him in disdain and, sitting down at the piano, began to strike martial chords. "Why don't you go and have it out with him now?" she suggested over her shoulder. Lanse sighed and hesitated.

"I hate to spoil his Sunday," he objected; but presently he went.

It was no mock contest to which she had sent him. The solemn, old-fashioned gentleman, with his dislike of the stage and impatience of artists, his pride in the business which three generations of oldest sons had built up in prosperity and honor, could never accept the fact that he had fathered one of the alien tribe, and that the drama-loving son, with his complex moods and sensitivenesses, his oblivious joy before "situations" and his blank unresponse to the problems of business, was not designed to carry on the family name

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in its old channels. That Lanse would work at plays in his spare time had long been a bitter grievance; how he would take an open attempt at a playwright's career was a serious question. Could any one have made him understand that his son found him "pathetic," sorrowed as well as smiled over his disappointment, tried honestly to protect him from too much knowledge of things as they are, as one protects the touching ignorance of a child, and, in his heart, considered him a poor, dear, dull old Philistine who couldn't help it—the old gentleman's unsound heart would probably have carried him off on the spot. He was always, in every capacity, the honored head of the firm; he could not have wound his watch or taken off his boots without some touch of that dignified consciousness. Never once, in all the years of sharp criticism on his son, had it occurred to him to wonder what Lanse thought of him. On that count, Lanse had been a better son than he could ever know. It was this protective pity as well as nervous horror of a scene that made Lanse walk so slowly back to the big, solid, ugly, prosperous home of his childhood.

He had left Evelyn soon after luncheon,

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promising to return and tell her of the encounter, but the long Sunday afternoon passed without bringing him. She waited until it was almost time for supper at Charlotte's, then hurried off, hoping to find him there; but he had not come or sent word, and they finally ate supper without him.

It was one of their quiet evenings. There was no light in the little sitting room but the glow of the coal fire, and, after they had settled down, no sound but the tinkle of spring rain on the windows. Cameron had stretched his young bulk on the hearth rug in Sunday night beatitude, and Charlotte presently bent down to slip a cushion under his head.

"I wonder where Lanse can be?" she said. "It is so unlike him, not even to send word. Lanse really has beautiful manners," she added reflectively.

"H'h!" grunted Lorrimer Ffloyd, as though recognizing some tacit implication. Paul's voice came tolerantly from the darkest corner.

"Ffloyd's manners aren't half as bad as they used to be."

"That so?" Ffloyd spoke anxiously. "I

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hope to heaven that I am not degenerating into a young gentleman!"

"If I couldn't prove myself a genius except by my manners——" Donna threw out, and the two smiled amicably at each other.

"I know what is keeping him," Evelyn said hesitatingly; "only I thought perhaps he would rather tell you himself. It is so frightfully exciting. Henry Grenville likes his play."

There was a stir of interest, a sitting up of recumbent forms.

"Has he taken it?" they demanded.

"He has only had the first act and the scenario of the rest, but he says, definitely, that he will take it if it doesn't fall off, and he wants Lanse to finish it at once, because his present play is not going well. Don't you think he ought to seize such a chance? That I am right in urging him?"

"Rather! I should say so!" It was a general assent. "And you mean that Lanse is at work now?" Charlotte added.

Evelyn's face clouded. "Oh, no; I am afraid he is telling his father," she explained, with a naïveté that made them laugh. "It is not a joke! He will have to get time off from

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the office to do this, and his father—well, you know!" They did know; and it was a sobering thought.

"Poor boy," murmured Charlotte.

"And poor old man," added Paul. "How came he by Lanse, I wonder!"

"There he is," exclaimed Cameron as the bell rang, and Charlotte rose to light the lamp, conscious that the time for firelit peace was over.

Lanse saw at a glance that they knew, but he made his excuses to Charlotte first. In the hour of death or the Day of Judgment, Lanse's silvery blond hair would be smooth, his dress immaculate, his deferential courtesy unruffled; but an hour's distress could leave his boyish face drawn and lined and ten years older. They felt his nervous tension so keenly that a constrained silence might have followed if Cameron, happily unconscious, had not blundered to the rescue.

"I say, Lanse, what did the old man do to you?" he asked confidentially, and so threw a welcome gleam of comedy on the situation. Lanse laughed with the rest, and took a chair beside Evelyn.

"How much do you know?" he began.

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"We made Evelyn tell," Paul explained.

"Oh, of course. Well, I have to make my choice, tonight. I thought perhaps you could help me." He looked with troubled intensity from one to another. "If I do this play, I leave home, and I don't go back into the business. And, incidentally, I——" he broke off, breathing nervously.

"Yes; you wound your father deeply," said Charlotte gently.

"Oh, but, I say, mother!" Cameron exploded, then obeyed her silencing gesture with a mutter of protest.

"It is easy to call him narrow and dogmatic and that, but it doesn't help him," Lanse went on. "However, I think that can't be helped. The real question is the practical one. Can I risk the experiment?"

"Grenville has promised to take the play," Evelyn insisted.

"But suppose I fail or he fails me. I have no money of my own; and I couldn't earn my salt in a business where I was not the only son." He winced under the avowal, moving his shoulders distressfully. "How I do loathe it! But one must have money."

Evelyn broke in impatiently. "Why must

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one? Talent ought not to be held down for *that*."

"But, my dear girl, suppose I wanted to——" He had started to say, "marry," but composure suddenly deserted him at the word, and he substituted, "set up a family," with a flush and a laugh. "That is not entirely a vulgar consideration, is it?"

"It is a secondary consideration," she said coolly.

"I am not so sure. It isn't a bad situation, you know," he added, turning to the others. "I am cast out of my father's house if I don't repent by nine o'clock tomorrow morning. It feels biblical, someway. But it is horrible to hurt people!" with a shuddering memory of the afternoon's ordeal.

"He hurt you," asserted Cameron.

"But he can't understand; he is hurt in the dark, poor old boy. I understand his side just as well as mine, you see, so I am not angry and bewildered. It is easier for me." He started to his feet. "I wish I had never heard of the theatre! Charlotte, what would you do?"

"Just what you are going to," said Charlotte gravely.

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They all turned towards her, Cameron rising on one elbow to look eagerly into her face.

"I know," exclaimed Paul.

"It is what every one of Us would do," she went on. "Sink or swim, you will take your chance, every time."

"Hooray!" called Cameron, dropping back again. Lanse was looking fixedly at Evelyn.

"That is what you said!"

"It is what any one in his senses would say;" Lorrimer Floyd spoke irritably. "You can't play the game with one foot touching base all the time."

"And I can lend you a little if you get hard up," added Donna.

Their shout of laughter seemed out of proportion to the remark; but it was the poet of the group who always struck the practical note, and they had learned to watch for it and love it.

"I suppose it really is settled," Lanse admitted, stretching out his arms with a sigh of weariness. "I ought to spend this night on my knees in a vigil, oughtn't I? I must go home now and pack up. I shall use Stewart's

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rooms for a while—he left the key with me. Pity the poor outcast!”

“With quarters at the Buffington!” added Ffloyd derisively.

Lanse went to bed dismally enough that night in his luxurious borrowed rooms; but he awoke, late the next morning, to a vast relief. The leap was taken; fail or succeed, he was a playwright, a bright escape from the ponderous, crushing machinery of business. At last he could be himself. Close on his great relief came joyous minor reliefs: there was no family breakfast table awaiting his presence below, no grim comment to be encountered from an old-fashioned gentleman who did not sympathize with the artistic temperament, and cherished an annoying desire to have all his family about him during his solemn progress from oatmeal to hot cakes, *via* sausages or beefsteak. Lanse’s indifference to the value and importance of eight o’clock as a breakfast hour, and his somewhat shuddering refusal of strong food, tried the old man quite as much as the discordant breakfast bell and the heavy, unbeautiful meal did the younger, though the latter bore it with more philosophy.

“Poor man, he can’t understand,” Lanse al-

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ways concluded, with a shrug; "he has missed the best part of everything!"

He rose at his leisure, tubbed, shaved, and shampooed exhaustively, put on a dressing gown of old blue with a silk cord, and whistled down a tube for his breakfast. When the maid appeared with it, he was in an interesting attitude in one corner of the divan, smoking a cigarette over the morning paper. She was an unattractive young person—he afterwards discovered that all the maids employed in this great bachelor establishment were strikingly plain; but she drew up a table beside him with a demure little air that was not displeasing, and showed a friendly solicitude about the softness of his egg. To Lanse it was all immensely picturesque, and he acted the part of a languid but affable young prince with so much satisfaction to himself that he felt no need of an audience to appreciate and applaud.

When that scene was over, he played a little Chopin with one finger on the piano, and sang an aria with more dramatic feeling than voice; then, still thrillingly happy, he laid out his work. His father's pain, so distressful to him yesterday, had grown comfortably re-

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mote, the dire alternative of success was forgotten. All was beatifically well with the world as he drew up to the great carved desk.

It was a beautiful room in which to sit down before work. The dark oak panelling of the walls rose almost to the dull copper of the ceiling. Lamps and other furnishings of copper diffused a faint, rosy gleam over the sombre richness of aged carvings and draperies of deep brown velvet. Often as he had visited the place, Lanse had never realized before how many lovely things it held, or how subtly these were arranged. Half an hour after sitting down he caught himself still gazing luxuriously about him, and straightened up to his work with a guilty laugh. The end of a second half hour found him standing on a chair to examine the frame of an old Florentine mirror.

"I shall be used to it, after today," he apologized, startled back to his desk by the solemn chimes of an ancient clock. After another hour's struggle with inattention, he gave up and retreated to the couch with a book.

"I need a day off, anyway," he explained drowsily.

The next morning Lanse rose to a sober

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realization of his responsibility. He swallowed his breakfast obliviously, one eye on his manuscript, and was falling to work with harassed earnestness when the mail came, bringing a long letter from his father.

It was a dull, pompous letter, and it reiterated with untouched conviction all the arguments he had answered so exhaustively on Sunday; yet, back of its chilly willingness to give him "one more chance to come to his senses," Lanse divined the lonely, bewildered grief that had driven the old man to make the advance, and his heart bled. Memory of yesterday's careless happiness reproached and shamed him; it was horrible to be a father! He wrote a long answer, going patiently over the whole subject, then, feeling its futility, tore it up and wrote instead:

"I am so sorry. I wish you could see my side as I see yours.

"Your affectionate son, LANSE."

After he had sent it, it seemed to him patronizing, and he distressed himself trying to compose a softening letter to follow it. The morning was half gone when he gave up the attempt, and his jarred nerves made writing so hopeless that he took himself to a gymna-

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sium in a despondent effort to work the load off his mind.

Nothing came to interrupt the third morning's work. As a preparation for attacking the second act, Lanse went through the first act aloud, with much dramatic expression, especially in the part of the heavy mother. This was so enjoyable that he did it all over again, on his feet this time, moving R. F. or L. C. as the directions demanded, and becoming a whole group when the curtain fell. The applause was so insistent that, after taking curtain calls for the chief characters—leading out the heroine with graceful finger tips and bowing to her as well as to the house—he was finally induced to appear as the author, making a shy little blond bow and ducking quickly back behind the curtains.

"How young he is!" said the audience. "A mere boy—to think of his writing *This!*" And cries of "Speech! Speech!" arose on every side. The modest author was finally induced to appear again, clinging this time to his manager, and intimating that the latter was really the person to thank before he again shrank out of sight. The manager made a few blunt, hearty remarks about everybody's kindness

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and the author's diffidence, but still the house was not satisfied. How they thundered! Lanse's heart quivered and his cold hands shook as that mighty call rose and broke into cries again and again; and then there was tense silence, and he stood alone, facing them across a golden blur of light, moved, thrilled, soaring, to stammer a boyish, "I thank you—from my heart!" that should touch their eyes with tears—or would it be better to shoot into them one line of delicate wit, a perfect, rounded bit of audacity? Lanse perched on a chair arm to consider this; and the solemn clock struck twelve.

"Oh, good Lord!" he muttered, between shame and anger. "Oh, was there ever such a fool!"

He sat down savagely at the desk, but to work was like trying to cope with roast beef after a surfeit of candy. The dreams seemed to have scattered all his powers. He tried at intervals during the rest of the day, then went fretfully to keep a dinner engagement, where he appeared to the young woman next to him as brilliant, but painfully cynical and disillusioned.

The dreams were at him again in the morn-

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ing, but he stuffed his ears against them, and hung a towel over a lovely little 15th Century Madonna who had a way of holding his eyes with her brooding gaze. He also left off his blue dressing gown, as too enjoyable, and refused to look at his letters. Napoleon planning a campaign could not have squared his elbows to his task more grimly. At the end of two hours, Lanse would cheerfully have changed places with Napoleon, dead or alive. He wrote, to be sure, after an hour's blank sitting, wrote fluently; then tore the paper in half and wrote again, and yet again. His characters, so alive in the first act, stiffened to puppets under his pen, and his invention had become as an empty inkwell, in which he dipped in vain. His dream of years—perfect freedom to do his own work in beautiful surroundings—was fulfilled; but the inspiration that had gushed up for stolen moments in his stolid old home failed him. What he wrote was wooden, dry in his mouth. The poignancy of stolen love was proverbial; but surely authorship need not fade before the light of common day!

The next morning brought the same experience, and the next, and the next. Not one

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phrase came with the living glow upon it. It did not occur to Lanse that, as he had been burning his candle at both ends for many months, working hard all day at the office and writing far into the night, as well as keeping social engagements, this blankness was the natural collapse of an overwrought nervous system at release from routine. He saw it as a mockery designed by cruel gods, and girded himself savagely to defeat it. Coffee and stimulants, baths and athletics, he tried them all in furious succession for two dreadful weeks, and then at last, white and haggard, he started to take his bitter failure to Evelyn.

Till the moment when he paused before her imposing home, he had seen his plight only from the inside, with the dignity of tragedy upon it; here, looking on it suddenly with outside eyes, he paused, appalled. It was funny! A young man, with noble heroics, leaves home and wealth, solemnly breaking with an agonized father, to follow a career—which flatly refuses to be followed. He saw himself giving a mighty flourish of preparation, focussing all eyes upon himself, then stepping down in meek silence; and the picture left him red to the ears. He could not

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show such a mountebank performance to Evelyn—Evelyn, who loved success and distinction, who held herself carefully and never blundered. He turned hastily away.

It was Sunday afternoon, so he sent a telegram of excuse to Charlotte and hid in his rooms. He knew that he could not face his world again until he could laugh over his failure, and he tortured himself with pictures of the others shaken with genial or sardonic enjoyment of their mishaps. After a miserable night, he wrote a note to Grenville, saying that the play might not be done "quite so soon as he had promised it"; then fled to a remote country inn and spent three days in its chilly discomfort, trying to starve his reluctant spirit into laughter. Motoring parties stopped there daily for luncheon, but he always took that meal with him into the pine wood, and the rest of the time he had the place practically to himself. For long hours he lay in the sun on the pine needles, passive and wretched. He had lost his career; and the world expected him to chuckle over the tale. He had not even a home. His friends, who had valued him for his talent, would not want him any longer. Evelyn, born comrade

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to genius by her fiery ambition and her inflexible ideas, could not waste her stirring power on a nobody, and her wonderful friendship would grow dim and fade away. His face, upturned recklessly to the sun, was drawn and desolate when some one came walking lightly over the pine needles.

"Lanse!" Evelyn's amused smile vanished as she saw, and she put out both hands. "What is it?"

He had started to his feet, but before the compassion of her voice, he turned away, breathing so heavily that, in pity, she sank down, her face hidden under her drooping white veil, and told him, with her pretty, worldly composure, how she happened to be motoring with her cousins and had seen his name on the register.

"So I came out to find you," she concluded. "They said that you always went this way. How is work?" she added, looking up with a smile.

There was no answering smile. "I can't write, Evelyn." His voice was little more than a whisper. "It is gone. I haven't written a word all this time. Everything is perfect for it, and I can't. It is a tremendous

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joke on me—I can see that as well as anybody.” He seated himself beside her with a courageous grasp at levity. “You see, my dear, I am not the talented creature we took me for. We shall have to— Evelyn, it is *gone*. I can’t write! I can’t!”

“You poor boy!” She was looking at him through mist, the first he had ever seen in those cool blue eyes; her hand closed over his. “Why didn’t you come to me?”

It was so good, so unexpected, that he laid his face down on the slim fingers in wordless relief. After a moment they stirred and drew away. He looked up to speak, but her eyes, clear and cool again, ignored the incident, and the defensive lift of her head was a tacit command.

“You look like a ghost,” she declared impatiently. “Of course you could not write in strange surroundings, after all that had happened. What does a week or two matter? To tear yourself up like this simply because—I really think, Lanse, that you have very little sense!”

Her scolding was a healing and a delight. “You think it will come back? That it is not utterly gone?” he asked abjectly.

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She could scarcely answer, for righteous wrath. "It is too unbelievably silly, in a grown man!" She started to her feet. "Come back to town with us; you have been brooding here long enough. Of course you will write, Lanse. Tomorrow, probably. Now come."

He followed her down the winding path in wordless relief. Her faith lifted him, swung him clear up into the light again; and that glimpse of misty compassion sent all the veins of spring running within him. At the edge of the wood, Evelyn heard a sudden laugh, and turned inquiringly.

"You know, Evelyn, it really *was* funny," he explained.

At ten o'clock that night Lanse let himself into his rooms. His work lay as he had left it on the desk, and he paused to give it a conquering glance. The spirit of it presently caught him; he drew up a chair with his foot, and his hand found a pencil. The sleeping talent had stirred, had sent its first thrilling signal. Ten minutes later, Lanse was writing for dear life.

Far into the night his talent labored for him, and its offerings came so thick and fast that the pencil tripped and stumbled, keeping

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up with them. At last they dwindled and ceased, but Lanse sat over his papers in the happy work of adjustment and arrangement until dawn thrust a white finger through the curtains.

Noon had passed before he was sufficiently awake to look at the letters that had piled up in his absence. There was one from Grenville, and Lanse laughed as he remembered his request for more time on the play. His eyes turned triumphantly to the pile of manuscript beside him as he broke it open.

"Of course you must not hurry our comedy," Grenville had written. "Take your own time, and be sure you let me see it when it is done. I am putting on a new play presently, a remarkable piece of work by a new man, and if it runs as I expect it to, I shall not need another for a year at least—so perhaps it would not be fair to you to hold up your play. However, remember that I want to see it. I will send you seats for the new performance—I think you will be interested. You might show your comedy to Fred Harrison. I believe he wants something for next autumn. Best wishes!"

CHAPTER VII.

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IT was Evelyn who took the letter hardest; Lanse was grateful for her generous anger, but could not himself rise above dull depression.

"Actors always throw you down. We knew that," he argued, and would have defended Grenville's right to take the play he liked best, without regard to promises, if Evelyn had not lost her temper altogether.

"Oh, well, it doesn't much matter," he explained sadly. "I am a wretched amateur in the arts, and no practical good in anything else. We might as well face it. Oh, I am tired of nerves and brains and temperaments, I'm tired of civilization. I have a great mind to go back to the people."

"The people?" she queried.

He began to walk excitedly up and down. "That would be worth while," he exclaimed; "to go out into the city and see what I could

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earn with my two hands, like any other laborer. Wouldn't it be interesting!"

"But what can you do?"

"Oh, cut grass; make nice little rake marks on gravel; go about walking beside a wagon full of plants with a pot of geraniums under each arm—'Flowers, growing flowers!' " He imitated the vender's cry in somewhat grand opera fashion. "Think of being out all day in this new spring air—in a blue blouse open at the throat!"

She laughed at him. "You crazy person! I wish I knew just how much you meant."

"Every bit of it," he declared. "I have to earn my living, Evelyn—do you realize that? I shan't ask my father to take me back, you know; I'll starve first, thank you. My play will get finished some day, I suppose, but it is loathesome to me now. I'm going free, Evelyn! I'm going head first into the city!"

"You will only bump your head," she warned him, but he was too excited to heed.

Early the next morning a puzzled maid summoned Evelyn to the basement door. A man wished to see her. A glance through the iron gate showed her a slender workman in blue jeans, a rough cap on the back of his

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smooth head, his open blouse showing an incongruously white throat. She threw back the gate with a startled laugh.

"Lanse!" she exclaimed.

"How do I look?" he asked anxiously.

"Quite beautiful. Really, you ought never to wear anything else!"

He glowed with satisfaction, though he made a decent attempt to hide it.

"I doubt if I ever do," he said. "I'm going out to find the people. Oh, they are the real thing, Evelyn. All our hypercivilized ideas are an abomination in the sight of the Lord. I'm going back to the soil. To eat and work and sleep—that is the true life. Do you think my blouse looks too silly, unfastened like that?"

"No; I like it. Muss your hair a little—it is too well groomed. That is better. What shall you do first?"

"I don't know—I don't care. Evelyn, come with me!"

"Certainly not!"

"Donna would."

"Very well, then invite Donna."

"You have no adventure in your soul."

"I am entirely satisfied with the class of

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life into which I was born, thank you. When you have had enough of the people, come and tell me about it."

"I shall have to come to the basement entrance. Will you hand me out a cup of coffee now and then?"

"The American Tolstoi," derisively. "Twenty-four hours will cure you, my dear Lanse." And she closed the gate between them.

It was a wonderful morning. The shimmering spring sunlight lent a castled beauty to the stately vistas of brick and stone; but it lay like an enchantment on the more squalid streets to which Lanse turned. A red blanket on a fire escape became a flaming banner, a vegetable peddler's cart bloomed into a moving garden, the cries of venders and of children rang silver sweet on his expanding senses. The charm of dimly remembered foreign cities lay on the huddled tenements, mingled with a fairy suggestion of gnomes and brown witches and golden-haired changelings as he made his way buoyantly down the crowded sidewalks. The beautiful, kindly, simple-hearted People! He began to sing in his clear, high tenor, "Santa Lucia," and Little

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Italy smiled at him and threw him rippling compliments. Oh, the freedom of it, the joy of the young day!

As he shook out his final "Lu—ci—a!" a familiar voice laughed a "Bravo, signor!" and a penny fell at his feet. Donna stood on the scrubbed steps of a social settlement, shaken with amused understanding. He waved his cap in eager welcome as she came down to join him.

"I don't ever want to die, do you?" he burst out. "I want to live to be a hundred, and then begin all over again."

"Make it two hundred," said Donna, and they laughed gloriously. "What does this mean?"

"I'm looking for a job," was the blithe answer. "I have done with civilization, Donna; I'm going back to the people."

"Oh, what fun!" Her radiant appreciation of the adventure sent his spirits higher than ever.

"Come with me!"

"If I only could!" Their excited eyes met; then she glanced down at her incongruous clothes.

"I dare you," said Lanse.

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"Wait five minutes," she commanded, and ran back into the settlement. In less than ten she reappeared, transformed into a self respecting working girl by a faded suit, carefully repaired, and a poverty stricken little hat. Several amused faces were watching from an upper window.

"I may get a story out of it," Donna explained, in tacit apology to the morning's work she was dropping. "I don't care if I don't," she added recklessly. "Isn't this good!"

The sunshine was brimming in the streets as the two went down them, feeling very gay and very kind to all the world. A policeman looked at them oddly, and even followed them a little way, to their vast delight. They offered friendly good mornings to several laborers in the fullness of their hearts, but the replies were curt and somewhat suspicious. This was dampening. They studied their reflections in a shop window to find the reason.

"It is my collar and necktie," she finally decided. "They are off the key. What can I do?"

Lanse pulled a brilliant bandanna handkerchief out of his blouse pocket.

"Tie this round instead," he suggested, "It

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was to mop the toil from my brow, but I can use my sleeve."

The handkerchief evidently was the needed element. The next laborer they accosted gave them a jovial "Hello, mates," as he passed.

"Wasn't he dear?" said Donna warmly. "And he had such nice eyes. Did you notice, Lanse?"

"Um," he returned. "Look, that's a pretty girl. Did you ever see such glorious red hair?"

"Now we're even," suggested Donna; and they laughed out in enjoyment of their own transparency. Lanse stretched his arms up over his head.

"This is living," he exclaimed. "This is real freedom. We are where we belong. Oh, the days I've wasted in that stuffy office!"

"And the days I've spent in shopping and puttering," she echoed. "And never speaking to a human soul I wasn't introduced to first! Isn't it wicked nonsense?"

"And aren't we wonderful to have found it out?" Lanse went on. "We might have rotted in artificiality all our lives. Oh, simplicity is the real thing—the big, kind, warm people!" And Lanse was so inspired by his sub-

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ject that he walked into a vaguely ambling baby, which promptly tipped over and howled.

He was down beside it on the instant, wrung with remorse. "Oh, poor little brute! I must have hurt it. What shall I do? Donna, kiss it or something!"

He was so distressed and so helpless that Donna's eyes brimmed over with laughter. She restored the outraged baby to its frowzy mother, with earnest apologies.

"Law, honey, you didn't hurt him none," was the amiable response. "Don't mind his row—he'll shut up in a minute."

"There! What did I tell you?" exclaimed Lanse as they went on. "A polite person would have caught up her darling and glared at us. She'd have made us as uncomfortable as she could. I tell you, it is the people who have the true courtesy! I never intend to go back. How would you earn your living, if you were I?"

"We can find the best way from the people themselves," she suggested. "Let's talk to that lovely peanut man."

They broke the ice with a five cent purchase and a comment on the weather, and then in-

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quired into the state of the peanut market. The little Dago proved pessimistic, but admitted that a living could be made behind the push cart.

"If your wife no spend motch," he added, with a twinkling glance at Donna. The two laughed so that he became elated at his own wit. "If she vant earrings, silg dress"—an expressive shrug—"no can sell peanut." And he smiled on them genially.

"Oh, I keep her in order," said Lanse. "I'd like to see what I could make at it. Why won't you rent me your cart for an hour?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Donna.

The Italian hesitated at first, but the offer of a dollar down as well as all the money they took in finally persuaded him. The corner bootblack witnessed the bargain, and they trundled off with their new possession, speechlessly happy. A dingy side street promised less custom, but it was out from under the roar of the elevated.

"And we don't care about getting rich fast," Donna declared. "I choose to grind it, Lanse. You can do the selling. The idea of that little Italian trusting us like this! Don't you think it showed an awfully nice nature?"

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"Why, it's the people that are really fine," Lanse returned. "They trust and believe in each other. They have the hearts, Donna. They're as different from our class as sunshine is from electric light. I wish I had that old fellow's earrings! Don't you think they'd be effective?"

"Oh, this is going to make us such good friends," she exclaimed irrelevantly. "You and I have never known each other like this before, Lanse: we have only been friends in general. Now we shall be friends in particular. I think, you know, that we are the only two of Us who would have done just this."

"Evelyn wouldn't," he admitted, smiling to himself at a vision of Evelyn's pretty, fastidious presence.

"Lorrimer would scorn us," said Donna.

Their first customer appeared at that moment, a half grown boy who requested five cents' worth and offered a quarter in payment. Donna gave him extra measure while Lanse made change, and they both tried to enter into conversation with him, but he was reticent and disappeared as quickly as possible.

"Poor fellow—he was shy," said Donna.

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"They don't quite trust us, Lanse. They feel we're different."

"Yes, I am afraid they do," said Lanse, a peculiar expression coming over his face. "Does this quarter look quite right to you?"

She tried to think it did, but it was flagrantly, unmistakably lead. They both were disconcerted for a moment; then they laughed.

"The little beast!" she commented.

Several sales of the penny order followed, at long intervals; then three very dirty little girls came and stood wistfully in front of them, staring at the cart. They bore it for a moment or two, then Lanse drove his scoop into the nuts with an irritated movement.

"I can't stand that," he apologized to his partner. "Wouldn't it be better to get rid of them?" Three shrill "Thank you, sirs," went up, and the trio trotted off, the oldest one clasping the bag.

"That was fun," said Donna, smiling after them.

"Probably it never happened to them before," added Lanse. "We must seem like fairy godmothers to them. I suppose they'll put us in their funny little prayers—'Bless the

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kind people who gave us the peanuts.' Well, look at that!"

A swarm of children was coming from the direction the three little girls had taken. They seemed to multiply by some invisible process as they approached—ragged boys, wizened little girls, babies in carts and in arms and on unsteady, bowed legs, a noisy rabble whose watchword seemed to be an excited "There he is!"

They drew near, hesitated, halted. Then a little girl of the order "sassy" stepped forward.

"Mister, will you give us some, like you did Mamie?" she asked with easy assurance.

"Indeed I won't," said Lanse indignantly. "I'll sell you all you like."

"Aw, give us just one, just a handful," they clamored, and several came alarmingly close. "Lets take 'em, fellers," suggested one of the boys.

"Say, get out of here," said Lanse sharply. A dirty fist went out towards the feast, and Donna gave a gasp of fright as Lanse stepped forward. Several youngsters slipped round to the other side of the cart, hoping to profit by a scrimmage.

At that critical moment a rough voice of

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authority sounded: "Here, what's all this?" The children fled like rabbits before the official brass buttons. The officer turned scowling to Lanse.

"You can't block up a whole street here," he said shortly. "Move on!" An angry color rose in Lanse's face.

"It wasn't our fault, the little brutes——"

"Here, don't gab. Move on, I tell you!"

Lanse controlled himself with a mighty effort.

"Have you any choice where we should move on to?" he asked with ironical politeness. The answer was explicit, but not quotable; and the guardian of the law strolled off, swinging his baton. Lanse's hands were trembling, and there were tears of rage in his eyes. He savagely took hold of the cart and started off with it, Donna following meekly behind, afraid to speak. He led the way back to the corner where they had left their Italian friend.

"I think we have had about enough of this, don't you?" he asked with an evident effort.

"Yes, I'm tired," she answered. He looked at her remorsefully.

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"You must be," he said. "We'll give this back and go home."

But giving the push-cart back was not so simple a matter. The Italian was not to be found on the corner, nor on any of the neighboring corners, and no one knew anything about him. They wandered about forlornly. Their feet were very tired, and the glory had suddenly gone out of the day. Lanse's throat was beginning to throb and ache, thanks to the open blouse, and they both vaguely realized that they would never again eat peanuts with enjoyment.

"Oh, let's leave the thing and go," Donna was beginning, when an excited voice accosted them. The little Italian was bearing down on them with anger in his gestures and undeniable whisky in his gait. The dollar had done its deadly work. Beside him walked the policeman of their recent adventure. The Italian took his stand by the cart and looked at them dramatically over folded arms.

"Steala da push-gart—off hard ou-ork man!" he said sternly.

"We didn't steal your old push-cart," said Lanse angrily. "You rented it to us for an

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hour, and we've been waiting here for ages to give it back to you."

"I ou-ait on corner! No come, no come!" And he shielded his eyes Sister Anne fashion and peered down the street, then dropped his arms despairingly.

"Well, you waited on the wrong corner, then," declared Lanse. "Here's your money and here's your cart."

"See here," interposed the policeman, "I think you'd better come up to the station and get this straightened out. The Dago says you stole——"

"Oh, it's all right, Sheehan," interposed the bootblack, who, together with some fifty others, was listening with intense enjoyment. "I saw old peanuts rent the cart and take the dollar. He'll remember when he's sober."

"All right, then," said the officer with evident reluctance. "You may be just a crank, but I don't like your looks," he added dispassionately, turning to Lanse. "You'd better be careful."

"I'll trouble you for your name," said Lanse, suspiciously calm. Donna laid her hand on his arm.

"Lanse," she whispered tremulously, "please

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come right away." He bit his lips, then turned and walked off with her.

"It was dreadful for you. I am so sorry," he said, his voice still stiff with anger. Then, as he saw her face, his tone changed. "Suppose we go and get something to eat," he proposed more cheerfully. "It's past luncheon time. We will find a decent cup of tea, any way. You won't mind if the place is rather horrid, will you?"

They studied the outside of several little chop houses and restaurants, and finally fixed on one that seemed slightly better class than the rest.

"I think we can stand it, don't you?" he asked, pushing open the door for her.

"Why, this really isn't bad," she said, trying not to shrink from the odors that met them. As they moved towards a table, a young woman stopped them.

"Sorry," she said curtly, with a glance at Lanse's blue jeans, "but we don't serve laborers here. You'll have to go somewheres else." And she turned away before they could speak. Two young girls at a neighboring table giggled.

They walked quietly out. "I think we had

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better just go home," said Donna. "I believe I've had enough of the people for one day."

"Damn the people!" said Lanse under his breath.

"Shall we take a car?" Donna asked presently.

"How can I, in these clothes?" he demanded. "It would be pleasant to meet people I knew!"

"It wasn't my fault you dressed up," she returned. "I feel quite as ridiculous as you do."

"If you will wait, I will try to find a hansom," Lanse said distinctly, after a pause.

"Oh, I would rather walk. It will be quicker," she returned. And not another word passed between them until he left her at the settlement.

The adventure was over, the joy of the morning dead. Lanse found a lowly eating house where laborers were not discriminated against, and fell into despondent meditation over a cup of very bad coffee. The spoon, though clean, showed brown tracts where the plating had worn off, and he laid it aside with a frown. The very sight of the butter served with his bread was an offense, and he put it far from him, then bent his thoughts firmly on

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his Tolstoian ideal. But the way to its realization was hard to find. The simple dignity and honest weariness of bodily labor had seemed a glorious exchange for the complex miseries of an artist's career—but how could one work out the details when the man opposite was eating so like a pig? Perhaps it was only in the country that a return to the people was feasible; perhaps, if he finished that horrible play, some one would buy it, after all. If no one would——

“Well, one can always put an end to oneself,” he concluded, rising wearily. “I’d do that before I would ask to go back!”

The way to his bachelor quarters lay past his own home, but he did not think of that until he turned the familiar corner. Then an unexpected pang assailed him. The beautiful apartment to which he had fallen heir seemed suddenly empty and forlorn, and he wanted the ugly room in which he had been a little boy, and the kind old face of Molly, who had scolded and loved and served him for twenty-seven years, and the quiet and stability of the big, plain house which, for all its lack of charm, was still home. He drew near it slow-

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ly, then abruptly stopped as his father opened the door and came down the steps.

Lanse had not realized that he was so old a man. His walk had grown less certain, and he did not hold his head as he used to. He passed within three feet of his son, whose workman's clothes hid him as securely as an invisible cloak, and something in his face shocked Lanse into sudden, intolerable pain.

He let himself into the house and, slipping up to his own room, changed the blue jeans for an old dressing gown, then called for Molly, who fussed over him rejoicingly, brought him luncheon, and grew excited over the state of his throat. When she had dosed and cold-compressed him to her heart's content, he lay down in the library to await his father's return. He had no plan of action; pride and vanity had both gone down before the ache in his heart. He expected to wait in sorrowful patience; but, when Molly peered in at him, fifteen minutes later, he was heavily asleep.

When he awoke, the room was nearly dark. In the big chair facing him he could just make out the outline of an old man, his head resting on his hand as if he were very tired.

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Lanse lifted himself on one elbow. In a flash of revelation, it came to him that a compassionate prodigal might deepen his own abasement, in order that the lonely father should have the full joy of raising him up.

"Grenville has thrown me over, father," he began. "My career seems to have——" His voice faltered.

There was a moment's silence, then the old man lifted his head.

"I hope you are not going to be sick, Lanse," he said. "I shall need you down at the office."

"Oh, no; it's just a sore throat," answered Lanse.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAUL AND VIOLA.

DEEP peace brooded over Little Manasset Pond. Back in the city where the heat and glare had suddenly grown intolerable, the dust was settling undisturbed on Donna's typewriter and on Charlotte's easel and on the sheeted mound that was to be Paul's next statue. In the green depths of Little Manasset, the fever and the distress of work seemed infinitely remote.

"Like something that used to happen before we died and went to heaven," Donna said, stretching out luxuriously in the long grass. She and Charlotte were lounging on the bank above the pond, with books they were not reading. Further down, where the brook ran out, Paul was on his knees, playing at dam building with a thin, ragged little girl, solemn with excitement. Cameron, bare-footed as well as bareheaded, rowed about near the shore, shouting occasional comments and questions to which no one paid the least attention.

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"Mother, I'm lonely," he finally insisted. "Won't you go rowing with me?"

"By and by, Cameron," called Charlotte. "You mustn't interrupt me now—I am telling Donna a wicked story."

Her words had a disconcerting effect. Paul threw down his stones and tore madly along the bank, while Cameron, dropping his oars, leaped with a howl into the water and came thrashing and galloping to shore.

"Well?" they demanded, flinging themselves down on either side of her.

"Idiots!" she commented, helpless with laughter.

"If three days of Little Manasset brings them to that stage, what will a week do?" Donna wondered, drawing her white skirt farther from Cameron's dripping presence.

"I have to have something to offset Vy-ola," Paul complained, rolling over on his back with his hands under his head. "Is she looking wistful, Charlotte? If she is, I will go back; but, I give you my word, I ache from head to foot. I have worked like a dog."

"She is all right, and quite happy;" there was a note of protest in Charlotte's voice. "Why do you make such a slave of yourself,

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Paul? She will fasten on you so that you won't have a moment's peace."

"But she is such a miserable little brute," he apologized; "she doesn't even know how to play. And when her father is drunk, she sleeps under her bed, she is so afraid. She has never had anything pink in her life—she found a blue ribbon once, but she never found a pink one. She doesn't remember her mother, or know whether she's ten or eleven, and she has never heard of London Bridge or jackstones or—oh, Lord!" And Paul struck the ground with his closed fist.

"I know," said Charlotte slowly after a pause. "But we can't carry the whole world; and you will leave her far more forlorn than you found her, if you are not careful."

"Yes; there is that," he admitted. "And I will be careful. But it seems to me that it's better to have had even three or four good days than none at all to remember."

"And then, it is so picturesque," put in Cameron; "beautiful young sculptor shining down on homely little kid, while a small but appreciative——" He had wisely gathered his feet up under him as he spoke, and at that

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moment he needed them. A dexterous leap backwards was all that saved him.

"You will be picturesque by the time I'm done with you," Paul muttered, scrambling to his feet, and they were off, dodging and twisting among the trees. Presently the pursuit ended in sounds of scuffling and loud howls for mercy from Cameron. His mother and Donna exchanged smiles with perfect understanding of what was in the other's thoughts.

"I think that little pink blouse of mine could be cut down to fit her," Donna added as a natural corollary.

"I am sure I have some ribbons," Charlotte assented.

Nevertheless, they were secretly a little resentful when Paul proposed that Viola should go with them on their drive the next afternoon. They were planning to carry their tea things to a fabulously pretty glen they had discovered.

"She won't be any trouble, and it would be heaven to her," he urged. "You wouldn't mind, would you?"

Of course they declared that they would not.

"After all, it is just that quality in Paul that

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makes him so wonderful to us," Charlotte admitted, as she and Donna went upstairs for their hats. "We have no right to complain if we sometimes lose by it." Donna turned to her room without answering.

They were very friendly to the little girl when she appeared in a tattered gingham that was making a brave attempt to look as if a grown person had done it up. She sat between Paul and Charlotte on the front seat, breathlessly still, except once, when Charlotte insisted on taking the reins during a bad stretch of road.

"For really, Paul, you drive worse than any one I ever knew—not even excepting Donna," she declared. "If you ever looked at the horse, you might do a little better—but not very much!"

Viola drew away from her, and, looking up anxiously, laid a consoling little hand on Paul's arm. He smiled down at her.

"Isn't she mean to me, Viola!" he said. "You know I could drive if I tried, don't you?"

"You could do anything," said Viola, like one stating an obvious fact that needs no emphasis. Cameron groaned softly from the back seat.

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"Oh, my, another!" he murmured. Paul gave him a look of slow contempt, then turned back with raised eyebrows, as from something not worth crushing. Donna wisely made a diversion.

"Do keep the reins till we pass that wagon, Charlotte," she urged. "Paul always—what is it?" she broke off, for Viola, after one glance at the wagon approaching, had dived down under the seat. Paul, taking it for a joke, leaned down to laugh at her, but she laid her finger on her lips with such distress in her pale little face that he drew back without speaking. The wagon, a rattletrap affair, careened to one side with the weight of its driver, who turned a coarse red face upon them and pulled up his horse as though half intending to accost them. But Charlotte, not liking his aspect, hurried on, leaving him scowling after them.

"What a beast," she commented. "I don't wonder Viola was frightened."

The child would not come out until they reached the place where they were to boil their kettle, and had only a difficult smile for Cameron's teasing. Paul eyed her curiously, and devoted himself to raising her spirits with a new and exciting species of Follow My Lead-

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er. She was easily diverted, and followed with painstaking minuteness, a serious, awkward little figure, with nothing to show the joy within but her eager docility. When Paul dropped down, breathless, and declared the game over, she sat contentedly at his feet, frankly ignoring everyone else. Paul watched her in silence for a few moments.

"Viola," he began, when the others were out of hearing, "why didn't you want that man to see you?"

Color rose to her face, and she looked away without answering. "Was he your father?" Paul went on. She nodded.

"And you were afraid he would not want you to go with us?"

She glanced nervously through the trees about them, and then at the overhanging bank above, shrinking a little closer to him.

"He don't want me to speak to anybody," she said, half under her breath.

"But why not?"

She met this as she always met any direct question about her home—with a look of stubborn, fear-imposed silence.

"Surely he is willing you should have what fun you can—nice fun, like this," he pursued,

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determined to know how things stood with this hampered, unprepossessing waif of destiny. The child struggled with her reluctance for a moment, then leaned towards him.

"He just wishes I was dead," she said, her eyes on a braid of grasses, "and I wish he was." Her tone was entirely commonplace, but for its cautious lowering. Paul sat up in amazement.

"My dear little girl, you don't mean that," he exclaimed. She nodded emphatically.

"He was in prison a whole year once, and when he got out, I cried and cried," she said, in proof of her sincerity. "Sometimes I think, if he don't die pretty soon, I'll just kill myself. I think of it a lot," she added, lifting her expressionless little grey eyes to his face for a moment, like one confiding a cherished secret.

"But, Viola, you must not have such thoughts," said Paul vigorously. "It's wrong—it's wicked: don't you know that?" He was conscious of being flatly commonplace, quite without adequate reasons that would reach her. Viola, feeling his distress, offered consolation.

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"Maybe they will get him into jail again," she suggested.

"But why should he go to jail? What does he do?" Paul asked, dropping the ethics of the question. The cautious mask fell over her face. She dropped her eyes and said nothing. "Has he a trade, a business?" he went on, to bridge the pause, but her face only became more stubbornly set, though her chest rose and fell with the effort of her silence. "My dear, I didn't mean to ask questions that you don't want to answer: I was only trying to find a way to help you," he apologized. Her mouth quivered and relaxed, and she caught her breath with a sudden impulse, but at that moment a slight rustling sounded from the bank above their heads. She started to her feet without a sound and dragged at his arm to make him follow, such terror in her face that he caught a little of it, and let her pilot him in a roundabout way through the trees to the spot where the others were making tea.

"A toad jumped in the grass above our heads and frightened us to death," he laughed, clutching at the normal, humorous point of view to explain their abrupt appearance.

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Viola neither acquiesced nor denied. She was soon apparently quite happy over her bread and butter and cambric tea; but she would not again go near the bluff under which they had been sitting, and when, soon after, they drove out of the glen, she kept alert eyes on the road, and Paul knew that she was ready any moment to drop out of sight like a frightened squirrel. He was glad that she missed something shown to him for an instant by a turn in the road—a horse tied behind a sheltering clump of bushes, attached to a wagon very like the one that had passed them earlier in the afternoon. The burly figure was wanting, and Paul fell into uneasy wondering that kept his eyes somber even when he joined in the cheerful nonsense of the others. When they reached home, he walked with the child across the road towards the cabin where she lived.

“Remember, Viola,” he said gravely, “if you are in any trouble, or need help, you can come straight to me. And you won’t let dreadful thoughts stay in your head, will you?”

“But you are going Monday,” she said after a pause, burrowing in the dust with one bare foot.

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"But there is all Saturday and Sunday first," he answered. "Will you come over and play with us to-morrow?" She gave him a shy smile and stood to watch him as he turned back to the farmhouse above the road, entering his room by the long window from the porch.

But she did not appear in the morning. She must have heard their voices all day as they swam in the pond, which was respectably deep on one side, just beneath the farmhouse, and lounged in the grass, talking interminably, with open books in their laps, or trailed off on little journeys of exploration; but the cabin door never opened. Paul was at first frankly relieved, but towards evening he began to be uneasy. Finally, half impatient with himself, he crossed the road and, leaning over the remnant of fence that guarded the cabin, whistled a cheerful invitation. There was a faint movement of the calico curtain across the window, but no other response, though he followed up his signal with a call of, "O Viola!" As he turned away, a faint sound that might have been a sob arrested him; but it was not repeated, and he went slowly back.

"I wish I could find out something about

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the child," he said, later, to Charlotte. "They have been here only a few weeks, and nobody knows who or what they are. Viola will never answer questions, and they don't dare put them to her father. He does the cooking—what cooking there is—and she does everything else. I could stir up the S. P. C. C. if I had proof that he was cruel to her; but I have only a moral certainty."

For the first time, Charlotte failed him a little in sympathy.

"I know," she said; "but the world is so full of poor things! They make New York so oppressive to me sometimes, I can't stand it. I hoped that this was going to be a vacation from misery as well as from work."

"And it ought to be—you do so much!" Paul spoke with a quick generosity that left her secretly ashamed.

"If she were an attractive child, or even moderately clever, I suppose I should be all stirred up about her," she admitted to Donna when they were upstairs.

"It is because she isn't that Paul feels it so," said Donna slowly. "The pathos of the dead-ly commonplace——"

"If you are going to be literary, I shall shut

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my door," Charlotte objected. "She is a horrid little thing, and I will *not* be uncomfortable about her."

"Poor Charlotte! How your conscience is bothering you," laughed Donna, and Charlotte's reluctant laugh betrayed her.

The next day was their last at Little Manasset, for they were to take an early train back to town Monday morning; but still Viola did not join them. Once they saw a still, angular little figure watching them from behind a tree; but when they called an invitation, she vanished without answering.

"That proves that she is alive, anyway," said Charlotte, with an air of shrugging off responsibility.

It was a sultry, oppressive night, and though every window and door of the house was left wide open, not a stirring of air could be induced inside. Long after the others had gone to bed, Paul sat on the porch in the dim light of an old moon, discovering ships and Titans and Madonnas in the massed foliage of the trees. Donna, creeping down after water, saw him there, his dark head resting against a pillar, his face grave and remote, indefinitely strange to her. She seemed to be looking at

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someone she had never known and would never know, and, forgetting her water, she groped her way up the stairs again, to fall asleep at last in a little bunch on the floor, her head against the window ledge. About the same time, Paul, glad to find his tree pictures becoming blurred, went to his room and, after long stages of discomfort, fell asleep.

Several hours later, he came back with a start to full consciousness. He had heard no sound, yet he knew there was a reason for his waking, and his heart beat heavily as he hesitated to open his eyes. A glimpse showing that the room was full of faint daylight gave him courage for a wider look; and then he started up on his elbow with an exclamation:

“Viola!”

The child stood just within the long window, a gaunt little shadow, clutching nervously at her dark cotton gown. She said nothing, and, dim as the light was, he could see that she was trembling.

“My dear child, what is it? Were you afraid? Has anything happened?” he asked. “Come over here and tell me why you are up at this hour.”

She came slowly towards him, her eyes on

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the floor. He drew her gently down on the bed. "Was your father drunk? Did he frighten you?" She shook her head.

"You are troubled about something," he persisted, "and I am going to help you, you know. You can tell me, can't you?"

For answer, she buried her face suddenly in her elbow. She did not cry aloud, child fashion, but her little body shook with sobs that only her stifled breathing betrayed. Paul waited in silence, not even moving the hand he had laid on her knee, until she had struggled back to a tremulous self control, then he gave her his handkerchief from under the pillow with a smile so full of understanding and warmth and bright courage that it brought a wan response to the child's face.

"It's good to cry it all out," he said. "Then we can begin all over again." They sat in silence, one of her trembling hands in his firm clasp, while the dawn brightened outside and a sleepy chittering spread in the maples.

"Viola," he began presently, "when children are not happy in their homes, there are people in New York who find other homes for them—take them to some kind woman who wants a child to help her, and who promises

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to be very good to them. Now when I go back to town today, I am going to talk to these people, and see if I can't find such a home for you. As soon as I do, I will come down and get you. Wouldn't you like that?"

A faint light came into the dull little eyes; then it faded and she shook her head. "We'd be gone away and you couldn't find us," she said hopelessly. "Father, he won't stay anywheres long."

"But couldn't you write me where you were? If I gave you a——" he broke off, seeing the shamed color in her face. "But, of course, you aren't old enough to write yet," he said cheerfully. "When we find a nice woman for you to live with, perhaps you will go to school. Wouldn't that be rather fine?"

Her answering smile was born of politeness rather than of hope. "My father wouldn't let me," she said drearily. "He never lets me know people. He said I couldn't come over to see you again—not even to say good-by."

"Is he afraid you will tell things?"

The look of stubborn dumbness came back to her face, and she glanced nervously towards the open windows.

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"I must go back," she whispered. "He might wake up."

"Well, we won't really say good-bý," suggested Paul. "You know, I am coming back for you one of these days." His confidence touched her at last, and a glimmer of belief crept into her eyes. "Don't forget how to play Follow My Leader," he went on; "and you'd better finish that dam of ours."

She scarcely heard, her soul was so filled with an evident, breathless wish as she stood awkwardly before him. Paul, reading it, drew her towards him.

"Of course you are going to kiss me good-bý," he said with matter-of-fact friendliness. She mutely offered her pale little face, then turned and ran from the room.

It was nearly time to get up when Paul dozed off, and in consequence he was late for their start. Their bags had been sent to the station in a cart, but they had chosen to walk, following a shorter cut through the woods. As Paul hurried after the others, he sent a glance back towards the cabin. Viola was not in sight, but the wagon stood at the door, and her father seemed to be putting things

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into it. Paul hesitated, frowning with the effort to see more distinctly.

"Paul! you will miss the train!" called warning voices from the path ahead, and, with a sigh of perplexity, he followed. They walked rather soberly through the early morning brilliance. Donna tried to be enthusiastic over the hordes of buttercups and the bird songs, but they were all sadly conscious that their holiday was over, and that in town they must go their separate ways again. Their heads were tired from the hot night, their sunburn ached, and light heartedness seemed a rarer state than they had realized when they came down so gaily a week ago. Paul grew more and more silent, haunted by the little scene of the night and oppressed by a feeling—which he ridiculed, but could not drive away—that some one was following them. Time and again he looked quickly over his shoulder to catch the furtive presence, but to no purpose, and the unconsciousness of the others suggested his own jangled nerves as the explanation. None of them saw a little blue-gowned figure that watched behind the last clump of bushes while they crossed the open

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meadow to the station, then turned and ran swiftly back.

Paul had lagged more and more behind the others. The possible explanation of the wagon at the cabin door was beginning to force itself upon him, though he resisted it impatiently. It might mean a dozen things, but intuition told him insistently that it meant only one—another of those hasty movings that left no trace behind. And what use would it be to stir up good people in Viola's behalf, if she herself had vanished? He fought the idea, tired of the whole sordid problem; yet, as the train came in sight, he turned guiltily to the others.

"If you don't mind, I think I won't go up with you," he said with an effort. "Will you forgive me?"

They all looked a little blank, and Cameron began a noisy protest, but was silenced by his mother.

"It is Viola?" she asked as he helped her on the train.

"Yes; I can't help it," he apologized. She smiled at his abject tone.

"Come to me if I can help," she said.

Paul, with a long breath of relief, turned

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back across the meadow. Once in the path, he began to hurry, he could not have told why. He found himself running down the small hills and scrambling breathlessly up the steep places. As he came out on the slope back of the farmhouse, he was ashamed of his panic, everything looked so tranquil and usual. The meaning of the wagon at the cabin door was now unmistakable, for it was piled high with household goods. He descended dubiously, not quite sure what he should do. Then his eyes fell on the ruffled surface of the pond, and he knew why he had hurried.

The child lay in the water just under the high bank, and ripples were still circling away from her. Paul flung himself to the strip of gravelly margin and, clinging to an overhanging tree, caught a fold of her dress and drew her out upon the grass. He knew what to do do, and, throwing off his coat, fell to work, lifting his head occasionally to shout for help. At last steps sounded on the path overhead. A moment later he looked into the red face of Viola's father.

"Dead, ain't she?" asked the latter, after a pause.

"I don't know," said Paul shortly.

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"She come back from playin' in the woods and found me gettin' ready to move," he went on. "Guess she had a tantrum about it. You don't think she's alive, do you?"

Paul had not paused in his ministrations.

"If she is, she never goes back to you," he flung out. The father did not seem offended at this.

"I don't want her none. But I don't want her goin' around blabbin' about what she don't understand. Kids talk too much."

"She won't talk. You have scared her too thoroughly. Besides," he paused an instant to look straight into the evil face above him, "if you let her go without any fuss, I will see that she isn't questioned. Otherwise, I shall start an investigation."

The man twisted his lips consideringly.

"I heard you tryin' to pump her one day about me, up to that glen," he said suddenly.

"Yes—I know you did. And you heard that I didn't succeed. I am willing to drop all questioning if—there—I think—yes, she is. Can you get something hot for her to drink?"

"There's some coffee left."

"Very well, bring that."

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The man slouched off, but paused at the top of the bank. "I don't say as there's anything to tell, anyhow. Only kids get——"

"Yes, yes," said Paul impatiently. "Hurry up!"

A few moments later Viola opened languid eyes, that widened miraculously as they fell on his face.

"Well, young woman, so you fell into the pond," he said cheerfully. A shamed look crossed her face, and she lowered her eyes in silence. "It was lucky I came back," he went on. "I am going to take you up to town with me this very morning. Your father says I may." A light of eagerness shone out for an instant, but she shrank back as her father approached. Paul went to meet him and took the tin cup of coffee he carried.

"I left out some duds for her over there," he explained. "I'm off, now. And she can remember," he raised his voice, "if she ever takes to gabbin' about me or my affairs——"

"She won't," Paul interposed. "She is going to forget your existence."

"That's the healthiest thing she can do," he said, and turned away without a word of good-

PAUL AND VIOLA

by. A few moments later they heard the rattle of his wagon on the road.

When Viola came out of the cabin, dry and neat, her tiny bundle under her arm, Paul rose from the grass where he had waited and held out his hand to her. The shy radiance of her face touched and reproached him.

"You know, Viola, I am not taking you to anything very grand," he said. "You will have to work hard, but it will be for kind people, and if you try, they will be fond of you."

She smiled up at him wordlessly, in happy security, and they went up the sun-flecked path together.

CHAPTER IX.

AN OUTSIDER.

“IF you knew what it meant for a De Long to be earning her living!” Charlotte said earnestly. “Five years ago, they had everything; they were *the* people, up there. You remember, Paul; you knew them one summer. And now Elsie is coming down here to give music lessons. We must help her, children. She wants to find an apartment in a studio building—‘a big room for pupils and a little hole to sleep in,’ she writes.”

“I can help her there,” said Paul.

“My little cousins might take lessons of her,” Evelyn added.

Charlotte was meditating deeply.

“I wonder if we couldn’t have her here, just for a week or so, till she gets settled,” she suggested. “Cameron, you would have to give up your room and sleep on the cot in my work-room. Would you mind, dear?”

“Not a bit,” was the ready answer.

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"Very well, I'll do it. And you must all come in and make it pleasant for her and help me out, won't you?"

"Rather," assented Paul.

Donna and Evelyn arrived early the next Sunday night, to find Charlotte setting the table for eight instead of the usual seven. Her face wore a dubious, somewhat anxious expression.

"Has the lady come?" they asked.

"Yes, last night," said Charlotte with an unconscious sigh. "Paul sent her up some lovely violets. Wasn't it like him?"

They nodded, a little wistfully.

"There's no need of his being too nice to her," Donna finally ventured, and then all three laughed in frank understanding.

"We needn't worry, I think," Charlotte began. "She isn't exactly his—oh, Elsie, come in. Here are two of us for you to meet."

A slender girl with elaborately dressed hair came graciously forward.

"Charlotte has told me so much about you all," she said. "Which of you is it that writes? That must be very nice."

"Oh, it's a good deal like hard work," said Donna, who was too simple and friendly to

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know condescension when she met it. Evelyn had drawn herself up into the most correct of attitudes and was looking the visitor over with a cool and guarded eye.

"I hope nothing will keep Paul away," Charlotte said, to fill a pause. "He used to know Miss De Long several years ago."

"I wish I could remember him better," said Miss De Long thoughtfully. "I knew so many men then; my life was so full—he was rather crowded out, don't you know?"

Donna turned on the speaker such an amazed and offended countenance that Charlotte, to save her gravity, jumped up and hurried out to the kitchen.

"Donna, come and help me," she called back. Donna found her laughing to herself as she dried the lettuce leaves.

"Crowded out of her little seven by nine life—Paul!" began the girl. "Isn't that—preposterous?"

"Oh, it is funny, and it is pathetic," Charlotte answered. "That is the way she sees everything."

"Is it to save her *amour propre*, because he didn't notice her?"

"I think she really believes it. She sees

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things as she wants to see them. Oh, thank heaven we — that is Paul now. Go and let him in, dear.”

Supper was a dreary occasion. Whatever the opinion that was expressed, Miss De Long gently set the speaker right and dismissed the subject. In the intervals she instructed them generously on matters social, literary, and artistic. It was easy to read their attitudes. Cameron glared at her with open hatred when she courteously put down his mother. Charlotte was irritated, Donna distressed, Ffloyd bored to rudeness, Lanse amused, and Evelyn keenly on guard, ready to hit back so subtly and intangibly that Miss De Long showed her instinctive deference; only Paul remained inscrutable.

“I know her kind,” Ffloyd said to Donna afterwards. “She hunts up books nobody ever heard of, and then, when you admit you haven’t read them, she shouts, ‘You haven’t read *that*? Oh, you must! Promise me you will, at once!’ And you feel so like an ignorant boor that you do go and read the thing. But next time she has another all ready for you—‘Now, don’t tell me you haven’t read that! O Mr. Ffloyd, you have, surely! I

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can't believe it!' That's the way to make people think you are cultivated."

"I would rather they thought I had some manners," Donna answered. "Sh! She is going to play."

Miss De Long played beautifully; there was no doubt of that. They quite forgot and forgave in their enthusiasm for good work, crowding about the piano with eager comments.

"If you can teach others to play like that, you won't have any difficulty about pupils," said Charlotte warmly. "I know several mothers who would be glad to——"

"Oh, I shall have all the pupils I can take," interrupted Miss De Long, rising from the piano. "The Carroltons and the Bradbury-Coles and the Stephen Le Grands and a number of those people are going to send their daughters to me. They think it so terrible that I should have to do it," she went on earnestly, "but, do you know, I don't feel that way about it at all. I am quite proud to earn money. I was telling dear Mrs. Bradbury-Cole so the other day at luncheon—but, of course, she couldn't understand. Didn't your

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friends make it hard for you, Charlotte, when you began to work?"

"Oh, no—not the friends I cared about," answered Charlotte tranquilly. "Most of them were educated beyond that point. Do play something more, Elsie."

When the others had gone, and Cameron had said a sulky good night, Miss De Long leaned back and studied her patent leather slippers with an amused smile.

"Your friends are really very interesting, Charlotte. I enjoyed meeting them," she said. "Your Paul has an attractive personality, in a way." Charlotte winced and twisted in her chair, but said nothing. The other went on serenely: "I like his manner, too. And have you ever noticed what a good profile he has? He has looked up some apartments for me and given me a list. That was very nice of him."

"Yes, Paul is very—nice," assented Charlotte, with a longing glance towards the door.

"The one you called Evelyn attracted me the most," Miss De Long pursued. "She had a certain *savoir faire*, an air of social experience. She was rather more my kind than any

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of them, I fancy. She has been out to a certain extent, hasn't she?"

"Yes, I believe Evelyn has had—advantages." Charlotte rose to her feet with a desperate movement. "Now, you must be so tired; and we shall be out late at the opera to-morrow night. I am not going to keep you up any longer."

"Well, it has been a very interesting evening," concluded Miss De Long, following her down the hall to the room out of which Cameron had been turned. "I think one enjoys getting out of one's own little set once in a while, don't you? Whenever I have been in New York before I have always seen just the same people—the Bradbury-Coles and the Stephen Le Grands and all those, you know. Don't you think you get tired of your own sort, occasionally?"

"I should think you would," said Charlotte very sympathetically. "Good night, Elsie."

The various members of Us generally viewed the opera from the top gallery, on a strictly Dutch basis, when they went at their own expense; but for this occasion Charlotte, after due reflection over the extravagance, had bought three seats in the dress circle and in-

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vited Paul to go with them. They were admiring each other's general appearance in the parlor when Miss De Long swept in, trailing ripples of lace and chiffon and drawing on very white gloves. With her came a faint atmosphere of violets and cleaning fluid.

"Won't you need something on your head?" Charlotte suggested. "You know, we are just going across in the car." Miss De Long looked blank for a second.

"Oh, I didn't think," she said, recovering. "Yes, I will put on a hat." And she rustled back to her room.

Paul was distressed.

"Charlotte, I ought to have brought a carriage," he exclaimed. "I'm growing into a Hottentot. Haven't I time to run and——"

"No, you have not," said Charlotte firmly. "And I wouldn't let you in any case. She can go our way or—all ready, Elsie?"

"Does it look very funny?" asked Miss De Long anxiously. "You see, I didn't do my hair for it. It was stupid of me."

"You look just as pretty as possible," Charlotte answered; and she talked resolutely all the way over in the car, though Miss De Long was too much absorbed in saving her gown to

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listen, and Paul balanced in front of them with a look of such acute distress in his eyes that she could have cried for him.

"Paul, it's all right; and we have good seats," she whispered to him as they entered the opera house.

"I was a cad not to think of it," he repeated miserably. "Oh, I hate being poor with a woman! I'd rather never go near one than take her in a trolley car!"

"But you don't feel that way with Us," she urged.

"No. Thank heaven, that's different. But I can't stand it with outsiders. This way, Miss De Long."

"Oh—up stairs!" she murmured. "Why, really, this is very nice," she added, as they took the seats Charlotte had chosen with such enjoyment of her recklessness. "I have never been above the boxes before—though I know awfully nice women who go even higher than this. They say it is not bad at all."

"Why, we find the top gallery of all very much better than staying away," said Charlotte.

"Well, really, I suppose you are perfectly safe not to meet any one you know," said Miss

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De Long charitably. "There, that is Mrs. Bradbury-Cole, in that third box. Striking, isn't she?—such very good form."

Charlotte looked helplessly across at Paul, who was staring straight in front of him with somber eyes. The overture had begun, but all that wonderful opera was dust and ashes to them both. Their cheerful independence, which recognized social distinctions but refused to be troubled by them, was for the moment inoperative. For Elsie's opinions in the abstract they cared not one penny; but her manifest reluctance at being where she was depressed them intolerably. She was resolutely "nice" to them both, and pointed out to them persons of distinction with intimate anecdotes, even relaxing to good humored whispers of derision, such as :

"Fancy wearing a *pince-nez* with a tiara! Isn't that just *like* Mrs. Jimmy Horne?" But she hastily refused to promenade between the acts, and at the close she proposed that they remain in their seats until "the crush was over."

"I am afraid we may lose our cab," objected Paul, who had left them for a few moments in the last intermission. Elsie rose with relieved alacrity, betraying by her sudden

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spirits how acutely she had dreaded an undistinguished exit into a street car. All the way home she talked comfortably to them both, never once suspecting the wrenching effort of their response.

Thanks to Paul's list, the apartment was soon found. Charlotte demurred at the rent, but Miss De Long thought it very cheap.

"If you knew what the John Harveys pay for their apartment!" she explained, and paid down three months' rent in advance with a tranquil confidence in her own reasoning that made argument hopeless. The furnishing was done with exquisite taste, but with a disregard for cost that troubled Charlotte.

"I simply cannot live in ugly surroundings," Miss De Long insisted; "and it would be very stupid, too, from a business standpoint. The place must be pleasant to come to—you have no idea how much atmosphere means to the sort of people I go with. And then, money will be coming in at the end of the month. The two Carrolton girls come on Wednesday for their first lesson, and Mrs. Bradbury-Cole will send Marie Rose the moment I am ready; and there are dozens more all ready to come. I don't need to bother about money."

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"Well, that is very comfortable," admitted Charlotte, half convinced, yet uneasy. "And if you should need or want a few extra pupils, Evelyn's little cousins, the——"

"Oh, but I shall be very expensive," interposed Miss De Long; "three dollars a lesson, any way, and probably four and five."

"Oh, I see," said Charlotte quietly.

Miss De Long moved into her new quarters on Friday, and Cameron helped her with such obvious joy that his mother had to keep a severe eye on him.

"I have enjoyed my stay with you, Charlotte," she said graciously. "You have all been very kind, and I want you to come and take tea with me Sunday at five—Mr. Floyd and everybody. Will you tell them for me?"

Charlotte promised, and drew a long breath as her guest drove away in a hansom.

"You needn't think I'm going," began Cameron, instantly on the defensive.

"Dearie, I rather hoped we could all go," said Charlotte gently. "Her people and ours were so much to each other, years ago. She means well, too. Somehow, I am sorry for her." Cameron flung himself down disgustingly.

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"Oh, bother it!" he exclaimed. "I'm so blamed soft, I always do things when you go at it that way. And you know it. You're taking a mean advantage of my weakness. Mother, you're no gentleman."

She found the others harder to manage, but somehow Charlotte always had her own way. Evelyn and Lanse, who knew or were related to many of the families whose names Miss De Long rolled on her tongue, found a wicked amusement in her conversation, and Lorrimer Floyd, after hotly scolding Donna for going, followed her himself and sat severely aloof, refusing food, drink or conversation. Miss De Long played hostess with aggressive kindness and tact.

"I did not ask anyone to meet you," she explained. "I thought it would be pleasanter by ourselves. You are such a talented little group—I should not have dared ask anyone who was not very brilliant. I don't think, you know, that the richest and most fashionable people are always the cleverest. That is the trouble with my friends—the only thing I have against them—they are all so horribly rich and smart! Lemon, Charlotte?"

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Charlotte took her cup with a smile of gentle malice.

"I am glad you have us to run to for relief," she said innocently.

"Oh, I am afraid I shall have little time for 'running' anywhere;" Miss De Long spoke hastily. "My work will be very exacting—and my Sundays are promised three deep already. One goes out of town so much, Sundays, now that everyone has motors. I don't expect to have any free time at all."

She came back to that theme more than once, having evidently a kindly desire not to raise false expectations; and though she met their good-bys with a gracious, "I shall hope to see you all again," her tone implied, "in the next world."

"Now she has squared her obligation to you, Charlotte, by giving your friends a good time," commented Evelyn as they strolled away. "She can forget our names with a clear conscience as soon as she likes."

"Heaven grant she does!" murmured Floyd crossly.

The weeks that followed were so busy for Charlotte that Miss De Long was rather crowded out, though the thought of her al-

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ways brought a moment's uneasiness, until the girl finally came to call. She was more gracious than ever, but avoided the subject of her work, and dwelt so insistently on the luncheons and dinners that had been given in her honor that Charlotte felt all responsibility shifted from her shoulders, and was doubly cordial in her relief.

"You might stay and have luncheon with me," she suggested. "A little hash would be good discipline for you, after all your luxury."

Rather to her surprise, Miss De Long accepted at once, and seemed to enjoy the minced lamb and creamed potatoes and tea to a surprising degree.

"Our café is very nice, but I get tired of it," she apologized, as Charlotte served her a second time. "This has such a good little home flavor." Charlotte was pleased, but suspected nothing.

It was two weeks before Miss De Long came again, and Charlotte exclaimed on seeing her.

"Elsie, you are overworking," she protested. "Why, you're as thin as a little cat. And you are pale, too. I am afraid town doesn't agree with you."

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"Perhaps it doesn't," admitted Miss De Long. Her voice had lost a good deal of its assertiveness. "I don't believe I'm so very well. My head rather aches. I thought perhaps you would cheer me up."

The smile that went with the words was so troubled and wistful, so unlike the superb, condescending Elsie of other days, that Charlotte was touched and self reproachful.

"You poor child!" she exclaimed. "And I have been too busy to wonder about you, even. Don't you think a cup of tea would do you good? I am dying for one, myself."

"Why—if it is no trouble," said Elsie hesitatingly; and then the color rushed up into her cheeks and mortified tears came into her eyes; but Charlotte had left the room and did not see. In a few moments there was a little blue pot of tea breathing fragrance between them, and bread and butter sandwiches in thin triangles. Miss De Long lifted her cup with a hand that trembled.

"Oh, it is so good!" she exclaimed impulsively; and two tears ran down her cheeks.

"My dear," said Charlotte warmly, "you are homesick—that's what is the matter with you. And no wonder, striking out alone like this,

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after the way you have always lived. Why won't you come back here for a while? You can have Cameron's room and be as independent as you please—go off to your pupils every morning, and come back at dinner time. What do you say, Elsie?"

Elsie said nothing at all. She sat with her eyes on her hands, her lower lip caught sharply between her teeth.

"Just as you like, you know," Charlotte added reassuringly. "Our way of living is very primitive. If you are dismal it might do you good, for a week or so. But if you don't want to——"

"I do want to—more than anything on earth," interrupted the girl, in a voice that tried desperately to be steady. "But I won't come without telling you just—what is the matter. I haven't any pupils, and my money is all gone, and I haven't had—a real meal—for—" It was too hard; she could not finish. Her head went down on her arm. In an instant Charlotte was beside her, crying warmly,

"You poor girl! Why didn't you come to me before?"

"Oh, I couldn't!" in a stifled voice. "You see, they didn't go back on me at all; but the

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Bradbury-Coles went South—they hadn't expected to—so of course that took Marie Rose away. And the Carrolton girls have been ill, and the Stephen Le Grands had engaged somebody else for the present, and that was the way with all of them. And I didn't want to write home—it is so hard to explain things. Mrs. Bradbury-Cole would have done everything for me if she hadn't gone South. It all just happened."

"Of course—I know just how things do happen." Charlotte's voice was resonant with sympathy. "Now finish your tea, Elsie, and then come and lie down in my room till dinner time. I am so glad you came!"

She put her guest into a wrapper, tucked her up in pleasant darkness, and then went off to hasten dinner. Elsie lay in abject comfort, feeling the burden of herself shifted off her own hands, and reveling in her release. The door was not quite closed, and she could hear Charlotte moving about the flat. Then the front door shut, and Cameron's step sounded in the hall. She was sinking into drowsiness when his voice, raised indignantly, brought her back with a start.

"I don't see why she should come and hang

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around your neck, mother," he was declaring. "You have enough to do. If she's sick, why doesn't she go to the Fitz Willie de Green people she's always bragging about?"

Charlotte evidently protested, for presently he went on:

"No, I'm not selfish. I'd always give up my room like a shot for any one who cared about us in the least—though I'm two feet too long for that beast of a cot; I have to loop myself up at the foot. But she just uses us, and then snubs us afterwards."

Charlotte's voice answered reprovably, but the boy burst out:

"Well, I don't care. If she's going to stay here, I'll get out, that's all. I can't stand living in the house with a tin queen!"

The voices moved away. Elsie lay rigidly still for a few moments; then she rose softly and dressed, pinned on her hat, tipping it well down over her tear stained eyes, and took up her gloves. But as she stepped out into the hall, the homely sound of table setting came to her, the faint clash of dishes and the ring of silver. Then she heard Charlotte's laugh, whole souled, sweet, and generous, as irresistible to the lonely girl as a lighted window to

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a lost wayfarer. She hesitated, and then, turning back, took off her things, crept into the wrapper once more, and laid her head on her arms. But the tranquility was gone. Her heart was very sore, and she had taken up the burden of herself again.

"Asleep?" said Charlotte's voice at the door. "Come to dinner just as you are, Elsie; Cameron won't be home. Or shall I bring it to you?"

"No, I'll come;" and Elsie followed wearily to the table. The good dinner and Charlotte's friendly cheerfulness warmed her a little in spite of herself. When it was over she turned bravely to her hostess.

"Charlotte, will you help me to get some pupils?" she asked.

"Why, of course, I'd love to. But you don't want to think of work for a few days. Wait till you are rested."

"No; I want to begin tomorrow. Did you say that Evelyn had some cousins——"

"Yes, the two little Duncan Russells. I know they want some one right——"

"Not *the* Duncan Russells!" Elsie exclaimed.

"Yes," said Charlotte quietly. "Why not?"

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"Why, I never dreamed they could be—" she broke off and colored under the other's glance. "I don't know—one hears so much of the Duncan Russells," she explained, a little confusedly. "I have seen them at the Le Grands, but I never happened to meet them. Mrs. Bradbury-Cole knows them."

"They are very simple, well bred, nice people," said Charlotte; "and nobody in New York can help you so much as they can. I will write Mrs. Russell a note tonight."

Elsie moved restlessly about the room, her cheeks still flushed. Then she leaned her arms on the mantelpiece and rested her forehead against them.

"Oh, dear," she said irritably. "It is a nasty feeling, not to be—proud of yourself. I hate it."

"But it is very wholesome," added Charlotte.

When bedtime came, Elsie flatly refused to take Cameron's room.

"It will be only for a night or two, and there is no sense in turning him out, is there, Mr. Cameron?" she added, turning pleasantly to the boy, who had just come in. He colored

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furiously and protested in genuine distress, but she remained firm.

"Now I feel like a cad," he exclaimed, after she had gone to bed. "She won't be comfortable on that little cot, mother. Why didn't you make her take my room?"

"We will tomorrow," said his mother approvingly.

It was very late when Elsie woke up the next morning. Charlotte had set up her easel in the sitting room and gone to work on a magazine cover, but the maid was hovering near, ready to prepare the guest's bath and bring her an attractive breakfast. She came in refreshed and bright eyed, full of new courage.

"Now, Charlotte, I am going to attack the town," she said. "I expected it to come to me; now I'll try going to it."

"If you can spare five minutes first, you might let me sketch that hat," Charlotte suggested. "It is just what I want. Stand over there; that's right. Oh, bother—was that the door bell? Why, Harriet!" jumping gladly to her feet as a swish of skirts in the hall was followed by the entrance of an imposing woman who seemed to fill the room.

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"I got your note this morning, Charlotte," she began, "and I ran right down to see you about that little music teacher. I couldn't make out her name——"

"Not very little," interrupted Charlotte hurriedly. "Here she is—Miss De Long, Mrs. Russell."

"Oh, Miss De Long—why, I know all about you;" and she shook hands with irresistible cordiality. "Now, I know we are interrupting Mrs. McLean. Suppose you let me take you up to my house to talk business? That's good. Charlotte, how is my beloved Paul?"

"My beloved Paul is all right—I don't know anything about yours," returned Charlotte.

"Jealous!" said the visitor, with a delighted laugh. "He's coming to luncheon with me on Thursday."

"Then I am coming, too," declared Charlotte, laying down her brushes.

"Indeed you are not. But I wish you would come some other day—Friday?"

"No, Thursday!" Charlotte called after her defiantly.

"Friday!" she returned from half way down the stairs. Then she turned to Elsie, still smil-

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ing. "Mrs. McLean is a very wonderful woman," she said. "You are fortunate to have her for a friend."

"Yes, I am," said Elsie, with lowered eyes.

CHAPTER X.

CAMERON'S AFFAIR.

“O CAMERON!” called Charlotte from her work room.

“Yes, mother,” answered a somewhat reluctant voice from the hall.

“Do come and pose for me, like a dear boy. I need a very striking young man for my cover.”

“But, my dear mother, I have just time to keep an engagement.” Cameron appeared in the doorway, very much dressed up, very self conscious and dignified. “I promised to call for Miss Arthur at four o’clock. She’s going to take a walk with me,” he added, drawing on conspicuously new gloves with a man-about-town air, a heavy stick under one arm.

“How did it come about?” asked Charlotte, properly impressed.

“Oh, I simply asked her, and she said she would be charmed to.” Then the small boy came to the surface in a delighted giggle,

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"What's the matter with little Willie?" he demanded, swaggering. Charlotte laughed.

"What are you going to talk to her about?" she asked.

"Why, whatever the lady chooses;" Cameron became dignified again. "Books, theatre, art, music—she can't stump me. Would you wear these?" He pulled forward a buttonhole bursting with lilies of the valley, and studied it anxiously. "Lanse says flowers in your buttonhole are bad form now, but I do like 'em. What would you do?"

"Wear them," said Charlotte. "And then, if there is a good chance, you can give them to her. You have enough there for a corsage bouquet."

"Great eye," commented Cameron. "I'll do it. *Au revoir*, Mrs. McLean." At the door he paused, hesitating. "I say, do you suppose I'll bore her to death?" he broke out. "I know I'm only a foolish little boy. Won't she be wishing me in Jericho?"

"No, of course not," said his mother. "You may be sure she is very glad to do it. She told me you interested her very much. Go on, dear, and don't think about yourself. Just give her as good a time as you can."

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Cameron was beaming and confident again.

"All right, then. Here goes!" And he swung out, chest high and head up, young life cavorting perilously under manly dignity. Charlotte leaned back in her chair with eyes full of laughter. At a mental picture of the lady in the case, it suddenly brimmed over. Well, if Miss Arthur found it amusing, she was more than satisfied.

Cameron came home radiant, with empty buttonhole.

"Now *that's* what I call a lady," he confided to his mother. "You ought to have seen her—all velvet and fur and bully white gloves. She didn't just wear any old thing because she was going out with me. I tell you, we were a couple!"

"And how did you get on?" asked Charlotte, deeply interested.

"Well, the first ten minutes, it was pretty bad," he admitted. "Someway, she was so handsome, and so—grown up, you know, I wanted to excuse myself for living, and I just fell over my feet, right and left. I couldn't even talk straight—felt as though I had a mouthful of cold blotting-paper. But she didn't notice a thing and talked along as if we

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walked up Fifth Avenue every day of our lives; and so I got on to myself, and after that it was lovely. She's great."

"And you gave her your flowers?" Charlotte was longing to know more, but could not question him too closely.

"Did I! You ought to have seen me. She said something about them, and I said I had just worn them in the hope she'd notice, so that I could have an excuse to offer them. How was that for a kid?" And Cameron's chuckle would have assured the most anxious mother that she had not yet lost her small boy. "I wish I dared ask her to go to the theatre with me," he went on. "Do you think she would? I suppose we'd have to have a chaperon."

Charlotte, taken unawares, let a sudden laugh escape. Her son was indignant.

"Oh, I know she's ten years older than I am! But she doesn't look it, does she? And isn't a chaperon just for looks, anyway?" he demanded.

"Yes, dear. You are perfectly right;" Charlotte hastily recovered her gravity. "And I like it that you are punctilious about women."

"Well of course," said Cameron mollified.

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The theatre suggestion was not followed up, but Miss Arthur let Cameron take her to a service at the cathedral a few days later, and then she asked him to help her rearrange her library. His devotion grew with the weeks, and all the time that could be spared from his studies (and possibly some that could not) went to the making of a Christmas offering—an ingenious little wooden chest for jewels. He talked of her till only his mother would stand him. Teasing on the subject did not trouble him: indeed, he seemed to enjoy it. Charlotte met Miss Arthur on the street one day, and both women laughed as they shook hands.

"I'm afraid my small boy is boring you to death," Charlotte began.

"Indeed he is not. He is the nicest boy I ever knew," said Miss Arthur. "I enjoy him immensely."

"Well, you have utterly won his heart; and you are the very first." Charlotte sighed a little. "You will never find any truer devotion. A boy's love can be so angelic—once in his life!" she added.

"I hope—I should hate—" Miss Arthur hesitated. Charlotte put out her hand.

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"You are making him immensely happy, and doing him good. Only don't let him bore you."

"Oh, he never does that."

The first day of the Christmas holidays Cameron was allowed to go skating with his lady. For twenty-four hours afterwards he was like a jovial tornado in the little apartment. Charlotte, wearied with his noise and her own laughter, was thankful to see him go forth the following afternoon in the punctilious array that had only one meaning.

"Here are two hours of quiet, anyway," she said, smiling after him. "If the lady will only keep him to dinner!"

But in less than an hour he was back, a very different Cameron, silent, moody, with a look of tragic anger in his eyes that made his mother ache for him. He offered no explanation, and for the first time evaded a chance to talk of Miss Arthur. Indeed, he would not talk on any subject, but sat through a long evening with his eyes held sternly on a book, whose leaves were not turned. Charlotte at last made an excuse to cross the room, that she might gently rub his hair in passing.

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"Well, dear boy?" she said. "Can't you tell me about it?"

He lifted his eyebrows in polite surprise.

"Why, there is nothing to tell," he said. "Someone else—a fellow named Courtney—came to call on Miss Arthur, so I didn't stay. That's all. She asked me to come again to-morrow evening, but I don't know whether I shall or not."

Charlotte sat down by the fire and waited. Presently Cameron threw aside his book and jerked himself to his feet.

"I don't see how men like that get into nice houses," he burst out. "Mother, you know what kind of a woman she is—why, you want to take your shoes off when you go into the same house with her. She's the sort of woman you'd expect a queen to be—all lady, inside and out. You'd think anyone would feel it and respect it. And that man sat up there in her drawing-room and *smoked!*"

Charlotte would have strangled rather than laughed; but she attempted a faint defense.

"But, dearie, perhaps she has known him a long time. You know we like to have some people smoke here." Cameron brushed aside the argument as not worth attention.

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"And, then, I didn't like a story the fellow told," he went on, with an outraged shake of his head. "I don't mean it was shady; it would have been all right in most places. But to tell that kind of a thing before *her*! Wouldn't you think a stableboy would know better? Of course she had to laugh—she's so kind—but *I* could see she didn't like it. I felt I'd punch the fellow if I stayed another minute, so I got out. And if he is going to be there, I'll stay out. Good night." And he marched off to his own room.

Only a mother, and perhaps not all mothers, could have endured Cameron for the next twenty-four hours. Late in the afternoon, a little worn but still perfectly sympathetic, Charlotte dragged him out for a walk, and the young giant, bewildered and angry at his own sore heartedness, followed sulkily where she led, and would not seem to notice when they passed Miss Arthur's house.

"Suppose we run in and see her for a moment," suggested Charlotte in a sudden-bright-idea tone. "I really owe her a call."

"Oh, I don't believe I care to," was the grand reply.

"Of course—you are invited for the eve-

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ning. I had forgotten that," she amended cheerfully. "Is it to be—"

But Cameron was not listening. A cab had just passed, and the street lamp showed a young woman in velvet and furs inside. It stopped at her door. Charlotte looked back in time to see a man alight, then turn and offer his hand to the young woman. The pavement was slippery with ice, and she went up the steps with her hand still on his arm. Charlotte knew instinctively that this must be the fellow named Courtney.

"Shall we go home now?" she said. "A fire will feel good."

"You go. I'll walk a little more." And Cameron trudged off into the early winter darkness with his neck sunk into his coat collar, and his hat pulled far over his eyes.

When he got home, late for dinner, there was a note waiting for him. He took it up with a sudden light in his face, that died out as he read.

"It's just a note from Miss Arthur to say that she can't see me to-night—she has a bad headache," he explained carelessly. "She says she will write me to-morrow and make another date. Dinner ready?"

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Pride had set in, and anyone but a mother would have welcomed the change. Cameron's whole soul was bent on showing that he had never been gayer in his life, and Charlotte saw only what he wanted her to, patiently bidding her time. He was formal with her these days, keeping her at arm's length, and he kissed her good night with such an effort that she contrived to let him avoid what had never before been a ceremony, knowing how wholly he would come back to her when his bruised and bleeding self could bear the light again. The postman came seven times a day, and seven times a day Cameron slipped out and trudged down the three long flights to watch for him ; and each time Charlotte felt her heart thump in sympathy till a glance at his face told her hope was over for this hour, and the promised note had not come. When, hunting in the dark corner of a store closet, she came across the unfinished jewel chest, thrust down behind a box, she could have cried.

It was a dreary week, and at the end of it Charlotte drew up to her little coal fire in the early dark to make some stern resolutions. But instead she found herself listening to the soft clink of the snow against the window and won-

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dering where Cameron was. His quick step in the hall foretold news, and she turned eagerly as he burst into the room, snowy, breathless, all his pose and self consciousness swept away by some overwhelming feeling.

"Oh, mother, mother!" He flung himself down beside her and buried his face on her shoulder. "She's ill—dreadfully, terribly ill—she's been ill all these days, and I've never even been to ask about her. She's getting worse and worse, and they don't know whether she'll— And I've been sulking around thinking about myself and never even sent her a message! Think of her—" His breath came in quick gasps, and she felt his arms tremble.

"How did you find it out, dear?"

Cameron did not answer for some moments. Then, with a long sigh, he drew away from her and settled down at her feet, his face turned to the fire.

"Why, I walked by the house—I happened to—and there was a little card over the bell, saying please not ring, because of serious illness. So I asked at the basement. She had most fainted that day we saw her, at a tea, and—someone had brought her home in a cab. And sick as that, she bothered to send me a

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note, so that I shouldn't come round that night—think of it! And I never went near her. And now it's—too—la—”

Charlotte waited a while, then she told him about various wonderful recoveries that she had known of. It was not long before she had him cheerful with new hope. After dinner she heard him whistling softly in his own room, and, glancing in, saw him surrounded by his tools, working busily at the little jewel chest.

The morning news of Miss Arthur was encouraging. Cameron worked all day on the chest, and at dark, when it was finished, went buoyantly off for a last bulletin. His heavy step when he came back prepared his mother for his tragic face. Miss Arthur was very much worse. The doctor would be there on and off all night. By midnight they would probably know.

It was Christmas Eve, and the two were promised for a small party. Cameron would not go, but was so vehemently opposed to Charlotte's staying away that she finally went without him. But she could see nothing all the evening but the boy up there alone with his first trouble, and finally she slipped away. It

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was barely eleven when she let herself in and, after a glance at the empty sitting-room, stole to his door. He was not there, and his overcoat was gone from the hall.

She got together materials for a little supper and placed the gas stove ready to light, then sat down to wait. Presently bells and whistles announced Christmas Day, and fell away into silence again. At half past twelve Charlotte could stand it no longer. Putting on her wraps, she went down to the street, uncannily still now, and muffled in fresh snow. Only a few blocks lay between her and Miss Arthur's house, and she had no fear of the city at any hour. As she turned the last corner, she stopped short and drew back into the shadow. Across the street a lonely figure was pacing slowly along the block, pausing now and then to glance up at a house opposite. She knew him long before the street lamp showed her the boyish face, pale and set. Something in it kept her from speaking. She let him turn and go back. A wide path had been trodden in the snow on that side.

"I have no small boy any more," she thought sadly, and went home alone.

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An hour later Cameron came in, making clumsy attempts at noiselessness.

"I'm up, dear—in the dining-room," called Charlotte. He came in shining with good news.

"Oh, mother, she's better! She has passed the worst—they think she'll pull through!"

"I'm so glad, dear! How did you find out?" He looked a little confused.

"Oh, I wasn't sleepy, so I thought I might as well run around there and see the doctor as he left. I waited a few minutes for him," he explained. "Have you been in long?"

"Oh, not so very;" Charlotte was stirring busily. "I just felt like some chocolate. Will you have some?"

"You bet," said Cameron.

News from Miss Arthur continued better and better. Before she was taken out of town she was able to write with her own hand a little note of thanks for the jewel box and the lilies of the valley.

After she had gone, Cameron's mother sighed to see a new phase of the affair develop. He showed a growing reserve on the subject of Miss Arthur. When, according to her generous habit, Charlotte introduced the

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topic, Cameron, instead of falling on it, answered briefly or passively and presently let it drop. She respected the new mood, and, after a few weeks, Miss Arthur's name was almost never mentioned between them. The expansive little boy was evidently become a man in the concerns of his own heart, and Charlotte would not force his confidence, though she wondered incessantly what was going on back of this new secretiveness, and ached in sympathy for the ache she could only divine. All the boy's spare time now went to experiments in book-binding, and she bore the endless litter without a murmur, suspecting some new offering to the lady as its ultimate object.

Then one day she came running up the stairs, her eyes shining with joy for his joy.

"O Cameron, whom do you think I saw just now?"

He was at a critical place in adjusting an end paper, and did not lift his head.

"Dunno," he said, evidently without a suspicion.

"Miss Arthur—looking so well and pretty! And she sent you her love."

Cameron did not leap to his feet. He did not even look up.

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"Good work," he said cheerfully. "I must go and see her some time. Mother, will you put your finger here for a moment?"

Charlotte stared at him blankly. There was no duplicity in his serene voice, no pose in the frowning attention the end paper was receiving. And all this time— She turned and went to her own room.

"The little brute!" she muttered. Then she smiled broadly. After all, it only meant that she still had a small boy.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PROVING OF US.

“**A**ND so I didn’t do it,” Cameron concluded. “I just got out and came home. And do you want to know why?”

His mother drew a deep breath of relief for the present and dismay for the years coming. “Yes; tell me why,” she said.

“Well, it wasn’t principles, though I suppose it ought to have been. They just didn’t seem to matter. And, mother, it wasn’t because you would feel badly—you want it straight, don’t you?”

“Yes, dear boy.”

“Well, then, it was simply because I didn’t want Paul to think me a little fool. When it struck me that he would hear about it, I knew I just couldn’t. So I came away.”

They sat in silence a few moments, Charlotte’s hand moving half absently over the boy’s hair. Presently Cameron went on.

“Paul is good, you know,” he said, frowning over the effort at analysis, “and yet you don’t

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hate him for it. Some people are good because they don't know any better, and then they're muffs. But Paul knows a lot better—he could be as wicked as sin; but he just chooses not to. That's the kind I'd like to be."

Charlotte drew her fingers along her eyelids; then she gave a little laugh.

"How is a woman to bring up a great thing like you?" she demanded.

"Oh, don't worry. I'll get along all right," he comforted her.

She repeated the conversation to Paul, later, but he received it with unwonted irritation.

"I protest. It is not fair," he exclaimed, walking impatiently about the room. "Why should I have to pose as a guardian of young morals? Do you realize that you are condemning me to a life of deadly, vulgar, foolish respectability, just because you have a great, stupid son?"

Charlotte only laughed at him, but he went on, fuming:

"You have all fallen into an abominable way of referring your moral conduct to me. I will not stand it! Don't you suppose I lie and steal like any one else, when I want to?"

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This example business is getting on my nerves—I have to go about on my tiptoes, trying to fit your ideal. Hang it, Charlotte, I'm an artist, not a family physician. You are spoiling my work among you. You've got to stop."

"Words, Paul, words!" said Charlotte tranquilly. "You can't escape. You will be wise to the end, and to the end we shall all set our compasses by you."

"I'll fool you yet," he declared, and then they both laughed; but he was frowning again when he went away.

He did not go straight to his studio, but turned with a trace of defiance to a ground glass door near his own, bearing the name "Irene Potter." When he had lifted his hand to knock, he hesitated, then turned and walked away a few steps. The door was flung open, and the appearance of a tall girl in a painting apron brought him about with a half laugh of apology.

"What are you doing? Why didn't you come in?" she demanded.

"Oh, I'm just having a good resolution," he said, uncertainty in his voice. She moved aside with an abrupt gesture.

"Come in and have it here."

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"It is not the best place for them," he murmured, but he came, nevertheless. She went back to her easel and apparently forgot all about him in her frowning absorption. Paul smoked and watched her silently for a long time.

"What was the resolution?" she finally asked, without turning her head.

"Oh, it was along the lines of prudence and respectability; it wouldn't interest you." His voice was a lazy challenge. She turned to him impatiently.

"I wish I knew where you pick up all this bourgeois propriety that you're always coming home covered with," she exclaimed.

"You do know."

"Yes. And it's going to be your ruin. Oh, it makes me rage! You have some of the real fire—you know the secrets—and then you go and push the baby carriage round the square for an afternoon, and come back with the point of view of an intelligent greengrocer!" She stood over him, her hands thrown palm out in angry protest. Paul met her eyes steadily for a moment, then drew in his breath with a slight shiver.

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"Irene! For God's sake!" he murmured. She turned away with a shrug.

"Oh, I know! You have taught yourself to run away from feeling. You would rather be comfortable than *live*. But I intend to save you." She faced him with a rather grim smile. "There's a fight on between two women for the good of your soul, my dear Paul! And if I win, sooner or later you will do something, something really big. You will do work that lasts."

"And if you lose?"

"You will have more orders than you can fill, and your photograph in the art journals every month, and a large fortune that will enable your wife and daughters to take their place in society; you will be a popular and intelligent artisan."

"You hit hard, Irene!"

"I am right. I *know*. Paul, very few people have the real fire; don't let a lot of coddling women choke it out of you. It can't be fed on texts!"

"I wonder—I wonder!"

"I *know*!"

They might have been combatants measur-

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ing each other's strength, by their attitudes. Paul broke away with sudden exasperation.

"Oh, we think too much. I am going back to work," he exclaimed; and she did not try to keep him.

In his workroom stood the uncouth beginnings out of which a man was to emerge, a mythical figure of Genius that had been ordered for the new art gallery. Its companion, Talent, already stood veiled in a corner, grave and fine and earnest; but Paul had hesitated before the youth of fiery splendor that he had seen through half shut eyes in the blank clay, the exultant being who stood without the law, giving the world out of his abundance what all its weary straining could not attain. He went to work half heartedly, and was glad when the fading daylight released him.

In the morning he made a dogged attack on the little wax model that he had been following in clay, and spent a harassing day trying to do by will power what could be done only by inspiration—or whatever name it is fitting to give to that strange, eager current that spreads through body and brain when the imagination starts on a quest. All the half

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seen visions had subsided into conventional images that made him stamp with helpless anger. The glow and the joy of work were gone—probably forever. Late in the afternoon he went savagely to Irene.

"I can't do that thing," he accused her. "Genius! What do I know about Genius? I can't work—I'm just dead and cold—it's all over. I shall simply tell them to let some one else do their old statue. My career has ended, gone up in smoke."

Irene let him fume and tramp about the room without comment until his overwrought nerves were a little relieved. Then she gave him a cigarette, and swept some books off the couch with a nod of command. He threw himself down and pressed his face against a cool leather cushion.

"I knew this would come," she said. "I have been waiting for it. And I know the remedy."

"The remedy?"

"Of course you can't do work like that here," she went on. "It's a wonder the place hasn't killed your work long ago. It has hurt mine. Imagine anything valuable coming out of these square, hideous rooms, all just alike,

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on the eighth floor of a square, hideous building, with the elevator always full of dentists and typewriter girls! It's this public, proper, banal atmosphere that is crushing you. Morally the place smells of laundry soap. We have got to go."

"But, Irene, I claim to be above surroundings," he protested.

"So do I—when I am with the brass platter and Persian tapestry kind. It isn't what is on my walls, but the walls themselves, the doors and windows, the way in and out. I have been on the trail of a place for weeks; I shall know tonight if I can have it."

"Irene! You won't really go!"

"But I will!"

"That is terrible—I won't let you! What shall I do?"

"If you are wise, you will come, too." They had both plunged without warning into deadly earnest, though there was only a faint rigidity of attitude to betray it. Paul flung one arm across his face, and presently spoke from behind it.

"For the good of my soul, Irene?"

"For the good of your work," she answered steadily.

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"Oh, it is frightful to be as strong as you are—and as certain," he broke out. "Tell me honestly, don't you ever cry, or wish for advice, or even hesitate? Have you quite done away with the feminine tradition?"

She frowned impatiently.

"I have done away with the petty signs and symbols of femininity, I suppose. Do you find me any less a woman for that?"

"God help me, no!"

"Well, then! Now I am going out. Come back at this time tomorrow and pack books for me."

She went away with her usual abruptness, leaving him to scowl over troubled thoughts till hunger drove him out.

Work the next day was even more hopeless. Paul had once scribbled on his wall a line from "The Wrecker": "A sculptor should possess one of three things—capital, influence, or an energy only to be qualified as hellish"—confident in his own possession of the third requisite; but now even energy seemed to have deserted him. He struggled fitfully till mid afternoon, when a messenger brought him a note from Irene—an address, with "Come and see it" scribbled beneath. The address led

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him down an old fashioned side street, left stranded in the center of the town, and to the door of a wide brick stable, evidently disused. As he hesitated, an Irishman who sat tilted back against the wall waved a friendly thumb towards a side door leading to the attic.

"She's up there," he volunteered.

Paul mounted and found himself in a cavernous attic, full of a pleasant brown light under its steeply pitched roof. Evidently it had been inhabited before, and by people of their own tribe, for open doors showed him that two deep skylights had been let into the sloping roof, the space beneath them being partitioned off into two studios. The beams and rafters showed traces of former decorations, and there was a generous stove, as well as many comforts and conveniences not usual to attics. The whole gave an instant impression of charm and possibilities. Paul skirted boxes and a confusion of furniture, and found Irene, flushed and tumbled but very much alive, poised on the narrow top of a step-ladder, tightening a curtain wire.

"Isn't it beautiful? Doesn't it take a weight off your soul?" she called down to him.

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"My dear woman—not while you are risking your life up there. Come down this instant."

She laughed and boastfully stretched out her arms to show her perfect security. He had never seen her so splendid.

"If you don't come down, I shall come up," he threatened, jealous of her fearlessness rather than afraid for her. She came with a deliberate nonchalance that made every step a challenge. Some lurking imp of mischief had struggled to the surface, and there was amused consciousness in the corners of her mouth, in her whole bearing a disquieting charm made up of her old recklessness and a new delight in it. Paul fell back a step with the sudden recognition of a more immediate danger than he was ready to meet.

"What have you done to yourself? What have you found here?" he demanded.

She looked up at the old rafters, at the stream of sunlight coming in the gabled windows, at the dusky corners full of mellow brown light, and breathed deep with her satisfaction.

"You get it, too," she said. "You are dif-

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ferent already; and your eyes are three shades darker."

"Is it—the place?"

"You even stand differently. Oh, there's room here! And every inch of it is in sympathy with us. We can grow wings here—I see the tips of yours already. Won't you admit it?"

"I will admit—something."

"You can't deny it. Your eyes are almost black now. I had forgotten you were so beautiful, Paul!"

"You are growing taller every minute. You must stop! One can't look at a woman level. An inch more, and I shall be afraid of you."

"You are afraid of me now! Come and see it all. I have such plans for it. Shall I tell you?"

"No; not now."

"Will you see where I shall work?" She led him to the partitioned end, and they looked in the first door. Paul tried to say something casual, but broke off after a few incoherent words. Then they went silently to the second room, and lifted strained faces to its high windows. She laid her hand on his arm.

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"Well, Paul?"

He said nothing, looking straight into her unafraid eyes.

"You will work here every day—and you will see that I was right," she said.

A blind moment followed. When Paul found himself again, he was walking in a tumult of exultation through the ruddy streets, still vibrating with the sense of something splendid and living in his arms and against his face. He tramped reckless miles, but they could not sober him, and he could have shouted with joy in his own defiance. Love and work, work and love—that was all the world held for men such as he. His heart sang in its new liberty, and he felt wide doors swing back before him: he had exchanged a ceiling for a sky.

Hours later he came back through the lighted town, wondering at the crowds pouring into the theatres, when they might be at their own dramas, working and loving under dusky rafters. Then the sight of two figures in the crowd brought him down out of his paradise with a shock that left him cold, and old, and unutterably heart sick. Charlotte's serene face, her amused eyes, her evident pride

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in the overgrown boy beside her, followed him persistently down the side street into which he had turned to avoid her. He was still one of Us. And rage as he might, the claim was not to be thrown aside without a struggle. He could not get away from Charlotte's words, "You will be wise to the end, and to the end we shall all set our compasses by you."

Half a dozen faces confronted him, all serenely trustful. And Cameron, who had walked out of temptation that Paul might not think him a little fool! Oh, it was not fair, they had no right to hamper and bind him! They must live as they could, and leave him free.

By morning all that he really desired was to run away forever—from the tranquil faith of Charlotte, that bound him so unfairly; from the hampering devotion of the little world that said "Us" with a capital when no one could hear; from Irene with her turbulent power; from this terrible work wherein so much was expected of him, and before which he was so impotent. A new world, or the serenity of death——

"Coward!" he commented, and turned to his workroom. The gaunt frame, partly built

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up with clay, stood like a foolish caricature of the idea that had been shown to him in an enlightened moment and then taken away. He picked up the wax model that showed what the finished figure would be, studied it intently, then pushed it away with an exclamation of despair. He was still sitting idly before the waiting clay when Irene came, entering with an abruptness that gave him no moment for decisions. The magic of the day before was still in her face and voice and movements, though her direct, unconscious eyes seemed to hold no memory of what had happened.

"My packing is almost finished," she began, coming towards him with a vigor fresh and stirring as a strong wind. "I want you to help me for a few moments. There is a box of books——"

"Irene!"

"Paul, you beautiful!" Then she drew herself away to look at him triumphantly. "You didn't sleep. I can see it."

"Of course I didn't."

"Oh, I shall teach you to live yet! And then you will do your real work. It is I that

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am molding a genius out of clay." He turned away with a hopeless gesture.

"Certainly *I* am not. Look at that thing!"

She took up the little wax model and judged it gravely.

"It is just what I should expect to see come out of these surroundings," she said finally.

"It is worthy, and neat, and quite safe. The committee will like it."

"Isn't it horrible!"

"Fire and freedom, Paul—you can't do without them. When will you come?"

"Will you marry me, Irene?"

"Don't be tiresome. You know that I want that as little as you do. Come and help me now; my expressman will be here."

As Paul worked under her directions, some of her fine carelessness began to sweep through him. The load on his heart lifted, the claims of other affections seemed remote and unimportant. The glamour was over all they said and did, and they laughed like children. When they had lunched together, they followed her possessions to the new quarters and worked till they were feverish with weariness. Then she turned on him.

"Go home, Paul. I'm tired of you."

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"I don't want to. I like it here."

"When are you going to bring your work?"

He laid his hands on her shoulders. "Dearest woman! I shall make one more attempt to do it there. If that fails, then I shall know that you are wise as well as wonderful. This is Tuesday night; by Saturday I shall have proved——"

"Very well. I will come on Saturday and help you pack."

He had said that he would make one more attempt. And it must be an honest one—he owed that to Charlotte and Cameron, and Donna, and all these troublesome friends who had spun their artful webs about him to hamper his freedom. Three days was not much to set apart for them. And then——

He seized a handful of clay and turned to the rough suggestion of a shape that awaited him.

"Do what you can," he challenged the six that seemed to confront him. "If you fail, I shall never say 'Us' again; if you want me, you must work for me. You are all in the wrong, and you can't save me—that's what you would call it; but I owe you the chance. Here is your test! Show me that I can do

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big work without freedom, and I will believe you. But I shan't sacrifice the artist to the citizen, my good and sober friends!"

He went to work indifferently enough, but the sense that the issue was, in a way, out of his hands, quieted his racing thoughts. His attention was freed, and, though he turned it to his subject with a certain contempt, before an hour had gone the workman had begun to get the upper hand, the fire in his eyes had settled into a grave intentness. As the hours passed, slowly, out of the darkness and misery, his idea was coming back to him, the vision he had half seen in the moment when the youth of fiery splendor had answered to his first wondering over the embodiment of genius. He threw out of sight the laborious little image that had so cheapened his idea, and worked with his eyes on the inner vision, growing clearer and more imperative every moment. The tumult of the past days fell away till it was as dim and external as the experience of some one else. Irene became a beautiful picture that stirred but did not concern him. He locked his door, letting visitors knock and go away. The café below had orders to send up his meals, and sometimes

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they came, and sometimes they did not; Paul never noticed their omission.

The third day found him white and lined and unshaven, more spirit than human, seeing always his idea rather than the growing image before him. When the daylight went, he lit all the lights and worked on in numb persistence through hour after hour of the night. The cruel lights and hard shadows doubled his difficulties. His whole body ached with the physical labor demanded of it, his mind grew dazed and confused. Several times he heard himself talking aloud, and distressed himself trying to remember what he had said. But he did not think of stopping. His fagged brain kept repeating that the idea must be fixed beyond denial before Saturday, though he could not trouble to remember why.

The striking of a clock startled him. Was it six in the morning or in the afternoon? Was his work done? He pulled up the blinds, letting in a wintry gleam of early daylight, then turned slowly to his statue.

At first he felt nothing but the great shock of wonder and joy. Through the rough, unfinished work shone the idea that had held

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his inner sight, whole and resplendent. At last he had done it, the big thing! Out of the years of labor and sweat and hellish persistency had come this living creation that was facing the dawn with the pride of an equal; and he, the creator, had a right to his hour of exultation. All the work that was yet to be done could not make it a shade more beautiful; could do nothing but render it more legible to eyes unable to find the spirit without aid of the letter. It stood now in its perfection for him, and he had at last achieved.

And then, all at once, he realized the cost of this achievement; that he had done his great work here, in these surroundings, out of the abnegation of years; that Irene's wisdom was not his, and that, by the test of his own experience, he must be wise to the end. If Irene had contributed to this work, her gift was no more than a spark—the torch was all his; and a greater gift than that might some day be taken reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God. He cried out against the sentence, but his work stood inflexible, and he knew. His worn nerves gave way, and, throwing himself face down on the couch, he sobbed desperately.

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The tears relieved him. Presently he put out his hand and drew up a rug; and then he fell heavily asleep.

Hours later, he awoke to a new heaven and a new earth. A great tranquillity was over him. He turned to the moment when he would show Charlotte his work, and his heart warmed to the joy they would all take in it, those dear persons whose love and faith were so large a part of his life. Irene seemed as remote as the fiery episodes of his first youth.

He shaved and bathed, went out for a heroic luncheon, and then, bruised and languid, but blessedly serene, came back to sit at the feet of his work and learn. Even when Irene came, as she had promised, he felt no distress—only friendliness and a warm pity. He opened the door to her, and, taking her hand, led her to the spot where he had first seen and known, when he had let in the dawn. She gazed in silence. He did not look at her face, but he felt her hand grow slowly cold.

“Well, have I done it?” he asked very gently.

She made no answer. After a moment, she drew her hand away and went out, closing the door behind her without a glance back.

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Paul heard her steps die away in the distance, then turned to his statue.

"I'm sorry," he said half aloud; then he drew a deep breath and stretched his arms out wide. "*This* is freedom! And you taught me. I shall never forget. But they won, after all; I can still say 'Us'!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE LITTLE THING.

DONNA'S literary success, if not high, was very wide. Besides her work for children, she was the curled darling of the magazines that aim at the hearts and homes of the people rather than at their heads; magazines that deal in good red blood or the sane, wholesome uplift, and that take the public into their editorial confidence with ingenuous bluntness and earnest appeals for advice. Donna's stories were human, and often very charming; but they were undeniably moral. In their course, faulty heroines, maid or matron, were cured of every known fault or failing, and though they often made the reader laugh, there was always a passage near the end that called out touched, warm, glad tears. Donna herself cried over these places; but she recognized that her path did not lead to literary distinction.

"I shall never have a stylish audience," she

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complained. "The dentist's assistant has always read me, and the trained nurse, and the dressmaker by the day—the dollar and a half ones, at least; when they are over two dollars, I can't bet on it. But no one who keeps more than two girls has ever so much as heard my name. It is very discouraging. If I could just once get an admiring letter from a real lady who kept a butler, I should die happy. But they're all on purple paper with fancy edges!"

If the admiring letters lacked in social tone, there was no lack in quantity. They arrived in a steady stream, and Donna, though she laughed, loved them dearly and often answered with a genuine bit of herself. It was only when they came out of her own early life that they presented difficulties. She had a horror of seeming to ignore old ties, as well as an impelling friendliness that forbade dodging. Yet her glance was apprehensive when the postmark of her old home turned up in her mail. When it came, over unfamiliar writing, three times in as many weeks, she opened the third with a distinct sigh of impatience.

"DEAR DONNA," she read: "Do you remem-

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ber Ernie? I am back here for a visit—we live in Detroit now—and I have just been hearing about you from your Cousin Nettie. I have been so proud of you all these years. I have read every word you have written, and when a magazine has not your name in the contents, I do not buy it. I shall be in New York next week on my way home, and it would be wonderful if I might see something of you. I am only a little country mouse, but your cousin says you are just as dear as ever, and not a bit grand with all your fame. Donna, don't think me presumptuous. I can't tell you what it would mean to me.

“Do you remember the big willow?

“Affectionately your old playmate,

“ERNESTINE LEMOYNE.

“P. S.—My three favorite authors are you, Carlyle and Robert Chambers, in that order.”

The postscript startled Donna into a shout of laughter, and she re-read the letter more leniently. When a young woman intimates that the privilege of seeing you will make an epoch in her life, the natural instinct is to refuse. Vague perils hang about the nearer approach of such fervor. Donna was personally incapable of being bored by any sincere intercourse, but affectation could reduce her to

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dumb misery; and Ernestine was a very faint memory. Moreover, admiration had more than once been followed up by bare-faced requests for her influence with editors and publishers, and she had learned to be wary. But her sophisticated caution was hampered by a poignant memory of her own early years, when to Meet An Author would have meant the tremulous climax of her existence; and she had never lost the scared consciousness that she might have finished her days in just such dull starvation, had not her blessed talent furnished the key to freedom. She was sorry and touched, and her pen balked at excuses. Ffloyd came in while she was still hesitating over her answer.

"Another offer?" he asked. Her last notable letter had been from a missionary in Burmah, who, touched by her poem, "Afterwards," had spoken frankly of his loneliness since the death of his second wife, and begged her photograph.

"Read it," she said, and watched his face as he came to the postscript. Ffloyd was not easily amused, for his standard for humor was both strict and erratic, and he scorned to pay in laughter for anything that fell below the

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requirements; but he gave this back with a muffled "H'h!" of appreciation.

"I told you you were too nice to Cousin Nettie," was his comment. "How shall you get out of it?"

"I shan't," was the somewhat depressed answer.

"You are not going to have that girl on your hands!"

"We played together, Lorrimer, in a big willow tree. She says so. Besides, I remember it now—she was several years younger than I. We kept house."

"Stuff!"

"And she wants it so awfully."

"What if she does!"

"I don't see why you mind!"

Ffloyd did mind. He had so many objections to offer that Donna, combatting them, succeeding in convincing herself that no other course was open to her.

"But I don't want an Earnest Lemon sitting about here every time I come in," he finally burst out, goaded into giving his real objection. "I think she will be an infernal nuisance, if you ask me." His scornful version of the name brought a ripple of amusement.

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"You will love it," she assured him. "Ernestine will look on you as a famous artist, and be breathless over meeting you; and if you will make a little sketch for her, she will be thrilled to her very toes, and always save that first when the house burns down. I know. I was that way once myself."

"Where are they now, the glory and the dream?" murmured Ffloyd. "You are rash, Donna. I may fall in love with her."

"Why shouldn't you?" was the placid answer.

"You wouldn't care a damn, I suppose." He rose irritably, taking his hat.

"Don't be cross, Lorrimer; it hurts my feelings."

"Your feelings! You haven't got any. You are too literary to feel. Don't you ever get tired of this beastly good-comrade business?"

Donna looked him over consideringly. "My dear boy, you need exercise," she concluded. "If you will wait till I put on my things——"

But he was gone, banging the door behind him. He had shown this peevishness several times lately, and she looked after him with wondering disapproval. Then, after finish-

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ing her letter, she dressed at comfortable leisure and started out. At the doors below she found Floyd, waiting in huddled patience against the keen north wind.

"I thought you wanted to take a walk," he said aggrievedly as he fell into step beside her.

"So I do," was the mild answer that turned away wrath.

They walked themselves into their usual harmony, and, later, went to dinner together in good-comradeship of the most flagrant kind. Indeed, they became so friendly that, with four elbows on the table and the black coffee steaming between them, a secret that Donna had been cherishing got out of her control. She had been longing to tell for four excited weeks, and at the first taste of coffee she knew that she must.

"Will you promise not to breathe it?" she began. "I didn't mean to tell any one, not even Paul. But it is so thrilling, I must."

A shadow had crossed Lorrimer's face, but she was too absorbed to notice, and he promised cheerfully enough. She let her chin drop on her clasped hands for a moment of hesitation.

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"Oh, I shan't mind your knowing," she decided. "I am doing it, Lorrimer. I began last month."

"Your novel?" he asked quickly.

She nodded impressively. "My first darling novel. Of course, it is poor and crude and silly; but it's a grown up novel with a problem and a plot and—oh, everything. My dear, I am a real author at last."

"Bully!" said Ffloyd, so explosively that neighboring diners looked round. He was unaffectedly excited. No one had such a splendid generosity of interest as Lorrimer, once he was roused. He had to know all her plan of campaign, and they sent the waiter for a sheet of paper, that they might block out the chapters and study their sequence. Ffloyd was very strict about balance and proportion and other structural qualities that Donna, absorbed in the individual scenes, wanted to ignore. He drew diagrams to express the proper development of the plot, with hillocks of event increasing to mountains of climax, and Donna insisted on rival diagrams of converging zigzags; and when at last they leaned back with a laugh, their hands pressing scarlet cheeks, they discovered that the

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room had emptied and that the lights were going out.

"Is there any life in the world as good as ours?" she exclaimed. "You have been so dear and helpful, Lorrimer."

Ffloyd was printing, in beautiful script, "Donna's First Novel," across the top of the scribbled sheet.

"You want to keep this," he said. "We must get together on it again before long."

"But don't forget and speak of it before the others," she warned him, rising. "I don't want to be asked how it is getting on. Besides, it can't really be any good. I probably shan't finish it."

Ffloyd, holding her coat for her, smiled behind his glasses.

"Your modesty is of the incorrigible kind, Donnie," he said. "I used to hope that I could break you of it—but I give up."

"Oh, it isn't modesty. I simply know, that's all," said Donna cheerfully. "But it is pretty good for me, isn't it? O Lorrimer, I do hope Paul will like it!"

Three straight chairs, a rocker and a piano stool were drawn up to Donna's little round

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table, which was set with a bravely mixed collection of china and silver. Paul and Charlotte, arriving early, found Floyd already there, and somewhat injured at being forbidden to smoke, while Donna, covered to her throat in a big apron, was attending to last details in a hectic kitchenette, which had evidently undertaken the labors of a full grown kitchen. They looked in on her with offers of help.

"How is the Earnest Lemon?" they added. Lorrimer's name had stuck.

Donna hesitated, smiling to herself, and absently filling the chocolate pot until it ran over.

"Why, she is enormously pretty. (Oh, dear—Charlotte, throw me that dish towel.) She is little and soft and kitteny—awfully trustful and admiring, don't you know? I thought her a good deal of a duck, myself, and yet I wasn't—perfectly—certain— Well, you will see. I have only met her the once, and—she trembled, Paul. Her hands shook. At meeting me!" Donna was pitiful rather than amused.

"I can understand trembling at a meeting

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with you, Donna;" Floyd's voice was at its driest, and no one heeded him.

"Lorrimer came in, so she only stayed a little while," Donna went on. "She was dying to stay, yet she had to go—don't you remember that stage?"

"She looks in your face as if she expected a cuckoo to come out," observed Lorrimer.

"Well, if nothing more startling than a cuckoo ever came out of our faces—!" said Charlotte, sighing. "Children, do remember that she is not used to you. Paul really does go too far."

"I am not a patch on Cameron," was the indignant protest. The boy's name always set them smiling.

"You must give her her money's worth," put in Donna. "Meeting you is a tremendous event, to her. Won't you all appear as famous as you can?"

It was an inspiring idea, and they were rivalling each other at "appearing famous" when the guest arrived.

Miss Lemoyne, offering her small, soft hand, certainly was a dear little person. She looked up into each face with starry intentness, as if she had told herself, "This is the

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great moment of my life." Then she sat on the edge of a chair and confronted them as though the curtain were about to go up. And, of course, it did go up. Not one of them was impervious to such stimulation as that. They were appearing very famous indeed—very bold and gay and witty—by the time supper was on the table. Miss Lemoyne, politely given the rocking chair, sent a sigh of content into the momentary lull that followed their seating.

"Are all the other writers and artists like you?" she asked, with a simplicity of admiration that made them laugh.

"God forbid!" said Ffloyd.

"Are all the nice girls in Middleford like you?" asked Paul, with his warming smile. She sent a tiny smile back, but Donna answered for her:

"When they are as nice as Ernestine, they leave Middleford. Don't you find Detroit vastly better fun?"

Ernestine's eyelids drooped, giving her little face for the moment a veiled look. "We have only just gone there," she said. "Mother never leaves her room. I—I get what fun I can. Donna, did you really cook all this?"

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It was a question to go straight to Donna's heart. Her writing she took simply enough, but she was frankly vain of her cooking. She would have given Ernestine all her best recipes on the spot if the others had not objected.

"Miss Lemoyne can read all that in any home magazine," Ffloyd declared. "She has come here to get into the atmosphere of art—haven't you, Miss Lemoyne? You don't want Hints for the Housewife."

She had her little breathless smile for every appeal. "I know a literary lady who writes for the Detroit papers," she ventured. "She has published a book on 'Mushroom Raising in the Home'—do you know it? By Augusta Tilly. She adores your stories just the way I do. I lend her my copies of the old ones. I have them all, you know."

Donna shrank from the naïve tribute. "Ernestine is a perfect guest," she said with a defensive laugh. "I believe one could even read one's unpublished works to her, she is so polite."

"Oh, if you only would!" Ernestine flushed with eagerness. Charlotte laughed.

"That is pure bluff, Miss Lemoyne," she explained. "Torture couldn't make Donna

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read her own works aloud. She refuses to join authors' readings at the rate of two a month."

"I don't see why," Ffloyd began.

"I know you don't," Donna interrupted. "You would read your works on every occasion, if they were readable. Wouldn't he, Paul?"

"Most of us would, if we were properly asked!"

"Miss Tilly sometimes reads me her newspaper paragraphs," said Ernestine.

"I don't mind being a guest of honor," Donna went on. "There is a club up in Detroit, Ernestine, that has asked me several times. If they do it again, I will accept, and we will have a visit together. Then we can—" She broke off, startled, for she thought that the color had suddenly left her guest's face; but the change, if there were one, was so fleeting that she could not be sure she saw aright.

"That would be too lovely!" Ernestine was saying in her soft little voice. Neither Charlotte nor Ffloyd seemed to have noticed anything, but Paul's eyes were fixed on her questioningly.

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"Don't count on it, Miss Lemoyne," he said. "Donna always thinks that she will do it next time, but she never does." Donna was watching, too, and it seemed to her that the little guest looked relieved. Ffloyd was still trying to be heard in defence of authors' readings.

"If it is a question of taste," he insisted, "I don't consider reading your works aloud any worse than being interviewed and photographed. Charlotte, do you know that I found cameras all over the place here, the other day, and Donna telling the story of her life to a brazen young woman from a newspaper? If that isn't vain-glory——"

"But it wasn't a newspaper," Donna broke in. "It is for *The Litterati*; they are running a series on Our Younger Writers, and they are devoting a number to me. There is some dignity in that. Besides, it helps sell things. And I hated it, anyway." Her somewhat feminine processes made them laugh.

"I was chief lion at a woman's club once," Ffloyd admitted.

"And you *liked* it," said Donna with scorn. "I could have forgiven your doing it, with loathing—but not your enjoying it." Ernestine unexpectedly came to his defense.

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"But it was so lovely to do it," she urged. "You don't know how wonderful it is to—to meet people like you."

Ffloyd was touched. "Does it feel wonderful, this minute?" he asked, turning to her with the interest of the experimenter.

"Oh, yes!"

"Then we ought to deserve it more, give you more of a sensation. I shall make you a picture to remember me by." And, pushing aside his plate, he ran inquiring fingers across the embroidered doily that had been under it.

"Not on that," commanded his hostess, rising to find paper for him.

"Why not? Oh, be a sport, Donna!"

She refused to give up her household linen, and Ffloyd grew frankly cross about it. Donna left him alone, for discipline, turning her attention to Paul—a move that usually brought Lorrimer back at once, visibly chastened; but when she looked round to relent, a few moments later, she found him smiling over Ernestine's little murmurs, and meekly drawing a caricature of himself on the despised sheet of paper.

"She is no fool, that girl," Donna admitted, and rose to change the plates, glad of an ex-

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cuse to leave the table. Her party had suddenly got on her nerves. When she took her place again, Ernestine was holding her sketch in both hands, as something too precious to be trusted to one alone, and Ffloyd's expression was not that of one who had been disciplined.

"Now if Donna would only let me read one of her stories in manuscript, I should go home perfectly happy," she said.

"My dear girl, I will present you with a carbon copy of the last one I have written," Donna conceded, ashamed of her secret impatience.

Ernestine was a marked success. She made them feel romantic, dashing. Had she come out of her shyness, she might have spoiled it; but the rosy veil was never once lifted. She was as watchful as some little animal creeping in from the woods. Charlotte frankly loved her, and Paul grew almost paternal in his kindness, while all the experimenter in Ffloyd was roused. In his determination to make her "eat out of his hand," as he defined it, he took her off into the window seat while the others cleared the table; and at Donna's

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suggestion they purposely lingered over the work.

"Lorrimer is quite struck," she said gaily, piling plates in the little kitchen. "Do give him a chance."

"We are none of us quite good enough to be left alone with her," said Charlotte. "She is such a little white flower of a person."

"She didn't want me to come to Detroit;" Donna spoke abruptly.

"Yes, I saw that," exclaimed Paul. "I thought perhaps they were very poor, at home, and the little thing didn't want you to see it. You have made her perfectly happy, Donna."

"To say nothing of Lorrimer," Charlotte added.

Donna smiled, rather wickedly. "I wonder if he remembers what he called her?"

"Don't. I am ashamed we let him," Charlotte protested. "She is a dear child; I feel like a weather-beaten old town rake, beside her."

"Well, you know, she must be twenty-four at least," said Donna, apologetic for mentioning it, but forced into it by the general atmosphere.

When Miss Lemoyne left, two hours later,

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she had a typewritten copy of "The Clock Struck One," properly autographed, clasped tightly against her side, and she had accepted invitations from them all, but notably from Lorrimer Ffloyd, who was evidently planning to show her the town. Charlotte insisted on going home with her, to Ffloyd's visible annoyance.

"Lorrimer is so reckless when he is after a new experience," she explained to Donna as she put on her wraps. "One feels responsible for the little thing."

Donna had an unkind feeling that the little thing could look out for herself; but was ashamed of it when Ernestine's trustful eyes looked straight up into hers, at parting.

"I have a horrid nature," she told herself sharply when she was alone.

Ffloyd's curiosity was destined to remain unsatisfied. The next day brought them all sorry, childlike notes from Miss Lemoyne, saying that her mother needed her, and that she had to go back at once. She would never forget that brilliant evening.

"I wonder just why she went?" mused Donna; and then was again ashamed. Lorrimer was annoyed at the news, and talked

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vaguely of going to Detroit, but, when Donna encouraged the idea, he gave it up. He talked of her and her snowdrop quality a good deal in the weeks that followed, and Donna agreed with everything he said, a novel and irritating experience.

Donna toiled at her book, now happily, now with despair, and breathed no word of it even to Paul. Beneath the instinctive secrecy of her gift and her fear of failure was a child-like desire to surprise them with the completed work. Its final appearance before the public would be a tame and pallid incident beside the moment when she should lay down the manuscript before them and confess that she had "done it." Floyd worked over it almost as hard as she did, with an interest and enthusiasm that touched her deeply. She was one of the very few who had seen the possibilities for beauty in Floyd's difficult nature, but these days brought her a new knowledge of him that startled as well as moved her. She was ashamed that he should be so gentle with her, so patiently absorbed in her concerns. Something was quelling him. He could be gay enough, alone with her, but at their Sunday gatherings his face was often sad. Paul

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saw it, and finally questioned Donna on the subject, keen eyes on her unconscious face. They had lingered in the dining room after the others had left the table.

"I know. I have wondered if he wasn't simply growing older," she said thoughtfully. "You don't know how sweet and considerate and—human, somehow, he is becoming. No one can be as dear as Lorrimer, when he's good."

"You see a good deal of him?" Paul asked carelessly, balanced on the edge of the table.

"Oh, every other day, perhaps;" Donna evidently did not consider that a high average.

"He never comes to my place any more."

She paused before him, a laugh in her eyes. "Well, you know, Paul," she began, hesitated, then went on in a confidential rush, "it always *has* made Lorrimer a little tired!"

"What has?"

"Why, the way we all adore you!" Her eyes were as frank as her laugh. "He doesn't like having any one so much in the center, don't you see? It is a sort of general jealousy."

"Oh, I see," said Paul, and suddenly laid his hand on her shoulder. "Donna, you are the

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nicest child in the world," he added irrelevantly, a laugh in his eyes.

"Well, it's true," she protested.

When they went back to the other room, Lorrimer had gone.

"He simply rose and left, with no words," Charlotte explained. "He may intend to come back; he certainly did not say good-night."

"He isn't what you'd call the life of the party, nowadays," observed Cameron.

"I think he is still pining for Ernestine Lemoyne," said Donna cheerfully.

Ffloyd did not come back, but he appeared at Donna's door the next afternoon in his usual spirits; and his average for that week was nearer every day, had she noticed it. He was "dearer" than ever, stimulating and sympathetic, showing that strange new patience when she was braced for scorn and attack. Age or success or something was working a mellowing change. It was of him rather than of her work that she was thinking on Saturday morning as she stood running absent eyes down the columns of the newspaper.

Her own name caught her attention. It was not an unusual sight in the literary para-

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graphs, and she paused amusedly to read; but the first line struck the light out of her face. There stood her secret, printed for all to read: her "forthcoming novel," "the first from her gifted pen," hints of its plot and characters, veiled suggestions of its problem: all horribly accurate. And she had not told a soul on earth but Lorrimer Ffloyd.

"Oh, he wouldn't!" she cried, and cast about for explanation. She might have lost that first chart, which they had worked out together in the café; but she had brought it home and made a copy of it on her typewriter the same night, and both copy and original lay in her desk drawer, to prove it. "But he wouldn't," she repeated. Work was impossible. Disappointment that her secret was out was nothing, forgotten and swallowed up in a misery of dread. She tried to see it from another point of view, to say that the secret had been too trivial to be rigorously kept, that it might have been told through inadvertence; but her straight young spirit could make of it nothing but betrayal. Broken faith was broken faith, in little things or in big.

"He didn't!" she cried again.

She could not go to him and ask him, but

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it occurred to her that she might ask the paper. After what seemed hours of telephoning—explaining and waiting and doing it all over again—the information came: the paragraph in question had been taken from a Detroit newspaper, which had published it in a column headed Chit Chat About People. The literary editor politely hoped that she was not going to deny it.

“Oh, no,” said Donna faintly, and cut off with little ceremony an evident willingness to interview her. Ernestine, of course, and the literary lady, her friend, who wrote for the papers; but how had Ernestine known? Remembering the girl’s interest in her work, and the half hour in the window seat alone with Ffloyd, after supper, Donna saw it all, and a red wave of anger crossed her face. On the trail of a new experience, Ffloyd was ruthless as well as reckless; and he had used her secret as a bait. Ernestine, poor little thing, was not to be blamed for betraying a confidence that was given her so lightly. It was Lorri-mer who had violated the deepest law of loyalty.

“*He didn’t,*” sprang from her heart, but

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faltered at her lips. There was no other explanation.

The evening mail brought five letters from publishers congratulating her on the forthcoming novel and hoping that they might have the privilege of reading it. Lorrimer did not come, vastly to Donna's relief. Sooner or later they must have it out, but she was still too sick of soul to face it.

Sunday, to Donna, was a day that doubled happiness, but trebled any sorrow or care. Her spirit then took on a finer sensitiveness, saw more widely what life gave and what it withheld. Longings that the week's cheerful industry held in check filled the seventh day with dreams and unrest, and the bells, coming in at the windows on the morning sunlight, could bring a sadness more exquisite than joy. But to awake to trouble was to confront blight and desolation. Donna's life, usually so full and radiant, hung a dead weight on her hands all the long day that followed. Disappointment in a friend, bitter though it was, did not seem adequate cause for such bleak misery, and she blamed it hotly to the day—the wretched day, made to mock people who had not great warm homes. She had thought at

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first that she would not go to Charlotte's to supper, but, when the time came, she was too miserable to resist. Even encountering Lorimer could not be so bad as another hour of those silent, empty rooms.

Charlotte's front door had been left ajar for her, and laughter sounded from the sitting room. From the hall she could see them grouped about the table, bent over something that Charlotte was reading aloud, and an echo of her own name made her falter. She had come nerved for excitement about her novel, but not for hearing the paragraph read before Floyd's shamed eyes. When she saw that he was not there, the words began to reach her:

"——for this young authoress is as talented with a saucepan as with her pen, and many a dainty feast——"

"What on earth are you reading?" Donna's voice made them look up with a laugh, and they widened the circle to admit her, signing for her not to interrupt; but she seized the magazine with a relieved, "Oh, that!" The new number of *The Litterati* was out, with the expected article on her and her works, and blurred, impressionistic photographs showing Donna in a thoughtful attitude at the desk,

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and Donna, prettily feminine, watering her window plants, and Donna, high-aproned, before the gas stove. Amusement at the text brought her spirits up a little, giving her courage to play her usual part. Floyd did not come to face her, and, though this was a relief, it was a further disappointment in him. Evidently none of the others had happened to read about the forthcoming novel from her gifted pen, so she was spared that, as yet. Paul went home with her, and, as they left the other two at the lower door, she put her hand through his arm with a sigh of relief.

"Paul, did you ever betray a secret?" she asked wistfully.

"I'm afraid so," was the reluctant answer. "There aren't many sins I haven't committed, one way or another."

She thought that over, then went on with evident effort: "But did you ever tell one woman's secret to another woman?"

"No!"

"I thought not." She drew closer to him. "Now we will change the subject," she said with a sigh as they turned the corner. Neither of them had noticed a loitering figure that had waited across the street for over an hour,

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watching the door of the apartment house, and that now turned away with drooped head and dragging feet.

They all heard of her novel within the next day or two, and called up or came in to rejoice over it and scold her for her secrecy. It would have been almost as good fun as her planned dénouement if she could only have got the ache out of her heart. That clung like a thorn, and no shrugging or philosophy could soften it. For five days Lorrimer did not come, and she would not make it easier for him by sending a summons. She scarcely left the house, her dread of missing him being almost as acute as her dread of a meeting. She had given up hope, late Friday afternoon, and was starting out for some air when she came face to face with him at her threshold. He had not rung the bell; he seemed to have been leaning against the wall, staring at the closed door, and at its opening he made no move. There was a gray weariness in his face that shocked her.

"Are you coming in?" she asked. There had been no attempt at smile or greeting.

"I suppose so," he said, and followed her with dragging step. They sat down facing

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each other like conventional strangers. When the silence had lasted unbearably, he pushed his palm heavily across his forehead.

"It is almost too much trouble to begin, isn't it?" he said. "I am half dazed—I haven't slept for so long. Don't mind if I appear rather drunk." Again he tried to rub away the mists with his hands. "Have you wondered at my not showing up?"

"No." The grave syllable roused him, bringing him up sharply to the situation.

"You know why I have stayed away?" he asked, looking into her face for the first time.

"I think so." At her sombre tone, he turned away with a short laugh.

"You don't have to pronounce sentence," he said. "I can see. *Hic jacet* Lorrimer Ffloyd."

His attempt at levity jarred on her. "O Lorrimer, when we were such good friends!" she cried. "How could you go and spoil everything?"

"I didn't mean to, Donnie."

His gentleness almost unnerved her. "I had such faith in our friendship," she said unsteadily. "It was one of the solid things in my life—like a mother, or a religion. I never thought about it, it was so sure and

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sound—just took it whole, like the power to breathe. I would have trusted you with my most sacred secret. I don't know what to do."

He was looking on with an odd little smile. He seemed infinitely old.

"Well, you haven't lost my friendship, you know," he reminded her. "Of course, you don't want it now; and perhaps I couldn't—Well! Time may work it out for us, my dear." He rose and held out his hand. "Do you want me to say I'm sorry?"

Looking into his lined face, she felt sudden shame at hurting him so; it was not a life and death matter! Her high sense of outraged confidence might, after all, be half ignoble—an unconfessed jealousy of another woman's power. The silent admission brought a great lightening of the spirit. She took his hand in both hers and held it fast.

"It's all right, Lorrimer! I am sorry, too. We'll begin again and not hurt each other any more. Don't mind, don't be troubled!" The warm voice broke and tears hid him from her; but she felt his lips touch her hand, and then heard the door close. She longed to run after him, to forgive him more explicitly and

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make him happy again. The thought that he might come back kept her waiting and listening the rest of the day.

Donna awoke the next morning to find herself back in her old cheerful world. She was no longer wroth with one she loved, and though the experience had left her sobered, a little older in spirit, the healing warmth of forgiveness had taken away the pain. Floyd would come back, presently, his lesson well learned, and they would be as close friends as ever.

"Dear old boy," she murmured, looking over her letters in hope of one from him. He had not written, but the mail nearly always brought something to show or tell him. To-day it was a letter forwarded by the editor of *The Litterati*, with humorous comment and a copy of his answer.

"EDITOR *Litterati*,

"DEAR SIR:—I regret to inform you that you have been imposed upon. The article purporting to describe Miss Donna Herrick, in your recent number, was evidently written by some one who has never met the young lady using that pen-name. The real author does not live in New York, and is totally different

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from the person described and photographed. I could give you her name and address if the few who know had not been pledged to secrecy, the author having a modest preference for anonymity. I trust that you will have the matter cleared up and the impostor disclosed. I shall be glad to help you, either privately or through the columns of the newspapers I represent.

Very truly yours,

“(Miss) AUGUSTA TILLY.”

“Well, upon my word!” said Donna. When she noticed that the letter was from Detroit, she recognized the name as that of Ernestine’s literary friend, and found herself more bewildered than ever. “The woman’s crazy!” she muttered. She wanted to send it to Lorri-mer, as a sign that they were back on the old friendly basis, but finally decided to wait until he came in. It might be well to have something at hand to begin on. Her nerves had taken to strange startings at the sound of her doorbell.

Several days passed without bringing him; but they brought a growing wonder about him. Something in the situation was not clear. It seemed simple enough, put into words; but she felt an uneasy consciousness of more behind, and her thoughts fumbled at it unceas-

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ingly. She had almost forgotten Miss Tilly and her charges when *The Litterati* forwarded a second letter:

“DEAR SIR:—

“I took your letter to the real ‘Donna Her-rick,’ who was much distressed by it. She tells me that she has been troubled before by this woman in New York who pretends to write her stories, but begged me to let the matter drop, having a deep dread of notoriety. She refuses to demand any public retraction or explanation from you, a course to be expected by those privileged to know her exquisitely sensitive nature. For my own satisfaction, however, I will tell you that, five weeks ago, the real ‘D. H.’ read to me and two other close friends and admirers, from the manuscript copy, the story called, ‘The Clock Struck One,’ which is advertised to appear in the next number of *Men and Women*. I think you will——”

The letter dropped from Donna’s hand.

“Ernestine!” she gasped. “My Lord!”

A gust of laughter followed. Ernestine, the little white flower, the dear child who worshipped so innocently at their feet—oh, it was one on Charlotte and Paul and Lorrimer!

“I knew that girl wasn’t straight,” she de-

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clared aloud. "I knew it, but I thought I was jealous and unkind. The Earnest Lemon—*Oh!*"

Still shaken with laughter, she wrote all the circumstances to the editor, explaining how she had given her guest a copy of the story so triumphantly brought forward as proof.

"She has had a dreary life, and I suppose this is her first taste of importance," she went on. "I can see just how she slipped into it—perhaps through a misunderstanding, at first; and then found it too good to give up. Why disturb Miss Tilly's faith? Let her keep her little private glory—I don't mind. This may appear unmoral, but she is an appealing little thing, and one is sorry for her. It isn't as if she could be reformed!"

It was late afternoon and Charlotte would probably be at home, so Donna put on her things to go and triumph over her. As she picked up Miss Tilly's letter, a sentence at the end that she had passed over caught her eye:

"She has also confided to me the outline of her first novel, on which she is now at work."

At the reminder, the amusement left Donna's face. Even after his admission of guilt, it seemed so incredible that Floyd should have

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done this thing! Opening her desk drawer, she took out the memorable first draught of her book, and the typed copy that she had made when she came in, too excited for sleep. Then, as she looked at them, a startled breath parted her lips. This was a carbon copy, not original typing; the color was different and the letters less clear. She sank down on the nearest chair in a tense effort to remember. Evidently, then, there had been two copies; she must have taken the carbon and the second sheet mechanically, from long habit. And the other? Gradually it came back to her that a finished story had lain on the table beside the machine: "The Clock Struck One," of course—the date showed that. And so that extra sheet had been picked up with the other manuscript, and thus passed straight into Ernestine's soft, unscrupulous little hands. And Lorrimer had not told one word.

The only thought in Donna's mind was to go to him, to be absolved. She sped through the darkening streets, her soul far ahead of her steps, her heart half broken with shame and joy and surging affection. Not till she stopped, panting, at the foot of his stairs did any other thought come to complicate her in-

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tention. But there a new memory overtook her, the memory of his strange visit. If he was not guilty, what was he confessing?

She began to mount, her forehead lined with the effort to reproduce his exact words, that troubled day. As they came, her feet moved more and more slowly, a secret fear dawned in her widening eyes. Many things began to come back to her besides his words of that afternoon: the change in him, his absorption and sadness, his abrupt departure, that Sunday night, when she had lingered in the dining room with Paul—the mischievous meaning in Paul's eyes! She stopped short, her face suddenly drowned in color. For a moment she stood recoiled, her hand tightly clutching the banister. Then she turned and ran.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GLAMOUR.

C OUSIN AMELIA was a somewhat formidable guest, even for a simple home luncheon; but Charlotte blithely prepared her house and helped her little cook and put on with pride the gown she had made over so cleverly, and sent Cameron rushing down when the bell rang, lest an English visitor should not know the ways of American flats and should be baffled by an unattended front door that merely clicked in her face. They were a long time coming up, for Cousin Amelia had to rest several times on each flight, and Charlotte felt dampened and apologetic when they arrived. But the guest, if breathless, was warmly cordial, and the joy of hospitality soon rose again. Charlotte was proud of this imposing, handsome cousin-in-law, proud that she had a home in which to receive her and a splendid son to show her and a full, rich life to tell of in answer to her friendly and thorough question-

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ing. Cousin Amelia always suggested royalty momentarily unconscious of its rank. But she had been a good friend in the early years of Charlotte's widowhood, and her stately, peaceful Surrey garden was a grateful memory. Charlotte felt a sudden homesickness for its rich seclusion as she closed a window to shut out the roar of the street. She asked about the housekeeper and the dogs and the cross old peacock.

"And Cousin Eustace?" she added, smiling a little. Cousin Eustace was a younger brother whose delightfully prim little estate adjoined Cousin Amelia's, and who used to come through the gate in the hedge nearly every afternoon with some dry little errand—a newspaper clipping to show, a stone of geological interest, some unusual development of flower or leaf. His errand done, he always rose at once, made a few shy remarks standing, his eyes on the garden borders or the dogs or busy little Cameron, then went back again. He had seemed elderly to her, ten years ago.

"Why, Eustace is here—or will be tomorrow." Cousin Amelia was always surprised when others did not know of the family move-

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ments. "He came out with me, you know; but he is stopping a few weeks longer."

"Oh, I wish he would come to see me," Charlotte exclaimed.

"It will give him great pleasure," was the stately answer.

It was a stimulating afternoon, with the impalpable breath of rich ease in the air, and the friendliness of kinship between them. Charlotte was feeling very gay with its success when the guest rose to go.

"I wish you would be here long enough to meet my very dear friends," she said. "They are rather unusual, I think; they make my life here very full."

Cousin Amelia, cloaked and bonneted, kissed her warmly, hesitated, then turned back to lay a hand on her shoulder.

"My dear, I must tell you how brave I think you are;" it came on a rush of dignified impulse. "To live like this and have so little and work so hard—and yet be so happy, so spirited—Charlotte, I honor you for it!"

Charlotte's eyes had widened; she gave a startled glance about. "Of course, it *is* a little hole," she stammered.

"Yes; but you are bigger than your circum-

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stances," was the resonant answer. "No matter how poor and empty a life may be, a spirit like yours keeps it from becoming sordid. I want you to visit me, my dear, whenever you are in England." And Cousin Amelia kissed her again, then felt for a banister to guide her cautious descent.

Charlotte went slowly back to the sitting room and took a fresh view of it, still with the widened eyes of dismay. Of course, it was only a flat, her home; but it was such a long way up from the hall bedroom in which she had begun her struggle. She could feel now the baffled jerk or the scream of raked varnish that followed any attempt to rock in the spot that held the chair, and smell the gas stove that suffocated her when she was tired of freezing. Two rooms and "light house-keeping" had come next, and seemed luxury in contrast; and before their glory was dimmed, success had arrived, dear, kindly success, bringing her a little home and a cook and a future for her boy. Courageous to be happy, with all this! She rose up in anger at the idea and went quickly from room to room. Any cheap flat was a hole in the wall, of course; but nearly all the rooms were outside,

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and, if the woodwork was shabby, the papers were charming and the furniture distinctly not bad. A poor, empty life, with work, and such a son, and such friends? Charlotte cried out that it was nonsense; and, even as she protested, sank down and down into black gloom. The glamour that made her days gay had suddenly withered, and that word "sordid" stuck like a thorn.

"Cousin Amelia has been slumming, and I am the slum," she said with dazed bitterness. When a homely smell of preparing dinner crept in from the kitchen, she shut doors and opened windows with irritated haste. "I really do know nice from horrid!" she muttered.

The glamour did not easily slip off life, for Charlotte. Once in a while she chafed a little at the cramping limitations of poverty, but good humoredly, not forgetting the reality of her wealth in unmaterial things, or the mass of misery just beyond her doors that called her state luxury. By the grace of health and a romantic imagination, she had seen even her hardest days rosily. But Cousin Amelia's visit seemed to have passed like a blight over all her bright surfaces, leaving them bare and

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dull and shabby. The enormous desirableness of money, to which she always gave cheerful assent in theory, became all at once a realized and oppressive fact. To live gracefully, with beauty and harmony of surroundings; to be spared the odors of other people's lives and dinners in one's exits and entrances; to own space and sun and trained service; to get about in storm or heat unjostled and unherded; to pass easily from city to country, as the seasons demanded; these were not vulgar desires. Rather, was it vulgar to be content without such refinements, to dwell smugly in cheap ugliness and find a few poor mitigations worth the enormous effort of achieving them. "To live like this and have so little and work so hard"—the words burned.

Charlotte had known a touch of such moods before, notably after the night she had tried to entertain Miss DeLong at the opera, but she had always been so ashamed of them that that had shrivelled hastily out of sight. This time she was not ashamed. That was the worst of it; her shame was for the childishness that had found her grubby life so charming. She knew perfectly well that she was overtired from a long winter's work and so not herself,

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but that did not help her. Nothing helped her for several trying days, wherein all her household seemed to be doing its best to deserve Cousin Amelia's estimate. Cameron was rough and unmannerly, the little maid was caught in slatternly practises and became impudent, the doorbell would ring when there was no one sufficiently dressed to answer it, the clothes from the laundry intruded on the caller.

"I must see Paul. Paul will set me straight again," she exclaimed to her exasperated nerves, and turned relievedly to the thought of Sunday night. The five almost never failed to come, caring more for these meetings than for anything the city could offer; yet it so chanced, this week, that first Evelyn dropped out, then Lanse, and lastly Paul sent a hurried line to say that he would be out of town. It seemed to Charlotte that they must all be going off into bright and beautiful surroundings.

"Who wouldn't!" was her dry comment as she sat over the fire, looking a lonely future in the face.

An excited, "O mother!" presently broke in on her.

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"In here, dear," she called serenely. Cameron's conversations usually began at the front door. He came in thunderously.

"Mother! Paul's got a girl!"

She had risen from her chair. "What have you heard?" she asked sharply.

"Heard nothing! Saw her," was the triumphant answer. Charlotte sank back again with a relieved sigh.

"Oh, is that all!" she exclaimed.

"Well, it's a lot, let me tell you! You ought to have seen her—she's a queen! They were in a hansom, and old Paul was looking at her—oh, my!" And Cameron went off into chuckles at the recollection. "He's got it bad, this time."

"Oh, Paul always has a girl; it doesn't mean anything." Charlotte spoke impatiently, and Cameron was offended.

"Well, I came all the way back to tell you; I thought you'd be interested," he said loftily. "I shall be late at the gymnasium." And he went off again.

The news fell dismally on Charlotte's mood. It was true that Paul had many "girls," and this one might pass as the rest had; but it was always wounding to realize that they who

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held his steady affection, the deepest loyalty of his life, were never for one minute his loves. Sooner or later there would be a girl who did not pass; and then her "empty life" would be empty indeed. The realization came like a last straw to her despondency. Let him marry his girl and get it over with! She would go away, that was all. Someway or other, she must go away.

"She's in there," said the voice of the little maid in the hall. It was her method of announcing a caller. The door was pushed back with a hesitating hand, and the trimly buttoned figure of Cousin Eustace paused on the threshold.

"I may come in?" he murmured. Charlotte had started up.

"Cousin Eustace!" she cried gladly. As she took his hand, wonder followed on her eager welcome. In the ten years since they had met, a tumultuous lifetime had passed over her, mind and body, changing, marking and developing; but he did not seem to have altered by so much as one line. His gray hair, parting, smooth and even, over shy, dark eyes, was not one shade lighter, his close cut brown moustache had not given up a thread of its

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darkness, his pleasant brown skin held only the marks she remembered about his small, neat features. Even his erect figure had stayed the same. "How have you done it?" she demanded. "Why, I thought of you as venerable, and now we are the same age!"

"Oh, I hope not," he protested, and made her smile by bringing a thick envelope out of his pocket as he sat down. "I thought you might like to see some pictures I took of Bertie's ranch," he explained. Bertie was Cousin Amelia's son, whom they had been visiting in the Northwest. In former days, Charlotte used to turn obediently to the daily offering, newspaper clipping or twin plum or whatever it might be, but now, being more experienced, she laid the photographs on the table for the present and insisted on personalities.

"I want to hear first about you," she declared. "I can't get over it. Time must go at a different pace, in Surrey."

"Well, I was always rather an elderly chap," he explained with his shy smile. "I have been growing a bit younger, these last years. At least, so my sister says." His eyes turned longingly to the safe topic of the photo-

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graphs, but Charlotte would not indulge him.

"What have you been doing?" she asked.

"Oh, I have traveled a good bit—India and Turkestan and that, and I had a look in at Central Africa with a scientific exploration party." He gave out the information uneasily, as though ashamed of mentioning it. "The rest of the time I have been in Surrey. I have improved the garden."

"You couldn't have," she said. His well bred, English voice, the suggested background of ease and freedom, had made a swift appeal to her mood of discontent. He was suddenly dear and valuable to her. "You may have made it bigger or different, but you couldn't have improved it. It was such a jewel of a garden! I can't tell you how often I have thought of it, and of how good you were." The warm memory suffused her voice and eyes. "I had all sorts of hard times later, but I kept the key of those beloved gardens, and you don't know what a comfort they were—especially when I was rather hungry!" she ended with a laugh. He had forgotten the photographs, forgotten even his shyness.

"Hungry!" he repeated, so aghast that she laughed again.

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"Oh, only now and then. I never minded, and it is all over now. I knew you would have helped me. I always felt that we were good friends, even if you wouldn't know me very well." His color rose before the accusation.

"I was about rather often," he protested; "as often as I thought a clever woman like you could stand such a dull chap. I—I—well, you know, I felt quite lost after you had gone."

Charlotte was frankly pleased. "It was nice of you to like me. I must have seemed very crude and excitable and—American, and all the things you Britons don't like."

"I thought you very brilliant and charming," he said with a simplicity that was endearing. "Now there is a photograph here I want you to see. It gives you quite an idea of the mountains."

She submitted to half a dozen prints, outwardly attentive, though her mind had flown to domestic details. Her instinct of hospitality, crushed to earth since Cousin Amelia's visit, had begun to stir suggestively.

"How long shall you be here?" she presently interrupted.

"I don't sail for three weeks. But I thought

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of picking up a motor and taking a trip of some sort." He drew breath nervously. "I wondered if you and Cameron—perhaps you'd not care about it—you may think it too early in the year yet—but if it would interest you, as my guests——"

"A motoring trip? Oh, I'd love it!" Charlotte's enthusiasm had swept her out of her chair. She had been longing so acutely to get away from her life that the prospect seemed like a magic intervention. "Of course it is not too early; it may turn really warm any moment now. And Cameron has his Easter holidays. O Cousin Eustace, how soon can we go?"

"Tomorrow, if you like," was the gratified answer. "Look here; you didn't see this one of the imported cattle. I think they are rather fine, you know."

Bright skies stretched over them by day, comfortable hotels cared for them at night. Each day's route was planned with a capacity for infinite pains that should have marked Cousin Eustace a genius. Charlotte lay back on her leathern cushions without a care in the world, and saw that her mood had been right,

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that nothing could balance the ease and beauty and freedom of wealth. And its power to share these qualities, to see other beings as utterly happy as she and Cameron now were, made her heart beat with desire. Her smiles ran over whenever she encountered Cousin Eustace's shy, dark glance or the boy's happy grin. Their response was characteristic: Cameron would butt his head into her shoulder or throw her a loud kiss from the front seat, while Eustace would point out a lunatic asylum, or stop the motor to explain some peculiar geological formation. Cameron listened to his discourses with an absorption that reproached her. She herself never heard more than the opening and closing sentences, but shed her deceptive contentment on him in place of attention, and told herself that he was a great dear. At dinner, rested and refreshed in body and spirit, Charlotte usually came out of her trance and let all her vivid, merry spirit loose, Cameron playing a humorous second and Cousin Eustace looking on with a naïve admiration that was both stimulating and endearing. Sometimes she made gentle fun of his English customs; and rejoiced beyond measure in the serene, "Yes—but we do it,"

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which served him for argument. There was a subtle stimulation in the air, which she attributed to her relief from all money responsibility.

Each day was a brighter jewel than the last, and the fifth shone so resplendent that they tried to feel troubled, as a tribute to the mortality of all too lovely things. The climax of its perfection came at half past four, when they stopped on a pine covered knoll, deep in white sand, to get out the tea basket. The only time in the past five days that Cousin Eustace had shown himself ruffled had been when a delay had made it inadvisable to pause for tea. Charlotte lifted her face to the soft touch of the spring wind, and found hidden in it a salty taste of the ocean they were approaching.

"Now there is nothing on earth left to wish for," she cried, taking long breaths. "Eustace, you do these things beautifully!"

"Ah, you get that because the breeze is off the ocean," he explained, emptying the water bottle into the kettle. "I had nothing to do with it."

Her glance rested amusedly on his serious

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face; then she turned up the wick of the lamp and measured out the tea.

"I never had a nicer time in my life," she said irrelevantly.

"That is very good of you." He had spread the road map down on the sand, and was making it true to direction with a pocket compass. "I was so afraid you would be bored."

"My dear cousin, if you knew anything whatever about poverty and hard work, you wouldn't have feared that."

"Ah, well, you artists are not like poor people," he protested. "You have so much that is brilliant and gay in your lives."

"Um. But we have a good deal that isn't," with emphasis. Eustace looked up, keeping an identifying finger on the main road.

"But you would find Surrey no end dull," he said, so simply that she did not suspect his meaning.

"I certainly don't remember it as dull! It was very lovely. Cameron dear, do you want some tea?" she added, raising her voice. Cameron, who was absorbedly watching the chauffeur's investigation of some concealed valve, waved a biscuit to show that he was adequately provided for.

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"To visit in June, yes; but to live there—that wouldn't do, for you. I have been thinking about it ever since I saw you again," he explained, returning to the map.

"Thinking about what?" Charlotte was too incredulous to heed a throb of startled warning.

"Oh, well, of course it is of no use. A brilliant woman like you wouldn't look at an elderly, humdrum chap like me." Eustace took out a pencil and made a neat cross to mark their present position on the map. "But I wanted you to know, that is all. Do you realize that we are still up five hundred feet?"

Charlotte was too dazed to answer. Cameron came back for some tea, and she heard the two talking altitudes and then machinery, but could not rouse herself to take part. She could only stare through this suddenly opened door that led into a Surrey garden. Eustace put away the tea things, then got out an extra wrap for her, as the chill of ocean fog was creeping into the breeze.

"I didn't mean to worry you," he said drily as he put it about her shoulders. "I'm so sorry."

She turned to look into his face.

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"You are a very strange person, Eustace," she said gravely. "I can't quite believe—what you said."

"Ah, well, I put it stupidly," he apologized. "I never have known how to—to talk properly to ladies, I suppose. But it is quite true, you know. It was true ten years ago, only then I wasn't ass enough to give myself away." He smiled faintly. "Now we must start. There is a famous view on here a bit and we don't want to be too late for it."

The horn was croaking under Cameron's impatient hand, and they turned back to the car.

"I am very fond of you, Eustace," said Charlotte impulsively.

To find that she has been loved secretly, and without hope, is very touching to a woman of romantic imagination. The thing was utterly impossible, of course; yet, as they sped on through sunset into dusk, the glamour that had been stripped so roughly from Charlotte's present life began to gather in a luminous haze over what her life might be under the circumstances held out to it. Cameron would be easily reconciled to a change that brought motors with it! She smiled at his uncon-

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scious back, then turned dreamy eyes to a far off blur that meant the ocean. Nothing on earth could induce her to do it; but visions of strange lands, luxuriously visited, alternated with home scenes of ease and loveliness. She saw the gravel walks that, she used to insist, were combed and brushed every morning before breakfast, and the dogs panting on the brick steps of the terrace, the clean, bright shrubbery that was surely dusted by the innumerable housemaids, the aristocratic old brick house that had been rebuilt and added to by so many generations that it was like an ancient, wilful growth rather than the work of man. The life that went on in such a place was fixed, and no stranger might hope to alter its sedate course; but no stranger could be so crude or so foolish as to wish for changes. To conform would be the most flavored experience of a varied life. And Eustace himself? Surely one may be indulgent of little oddities and precisions when a man is so enormously a gentleman. Charlotte turned to look at him, and met his shy glance.

"From the top of this next hill we can see five counties," he informed her.

"All the kingdoms of the earth," said Char-

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lotte unthinkingly, then suddenly laughed aloud. Her eyes were still brimming with secret amusement when, with the help of compass and map, the five counties were pointed out to her. She made small pretense of looking.

"The masculine mind is a curious thing," she said. "Why do you two care if you *can* see five counties?"

"Why, it's interesting," said Cameron, so surprisedly that she dropped the point with a laugh. The outdoor world was a matter of color and shape and odor to her; Eustace's passion for identifying all its component parts, from a village library to a terminal morain, was one of the traits of which she was amusedly indulgent.

He certainly took perfect care of people. When they arrived at their hotel, late and tired and a little chilled, a fire burned in a private sitting room for Charlotte and a dinner table was spread there.

"I thought you would be fagged after so long a run," he apologized. "If you would rather I dined downstairs——"

"But I wouldn't," she interrupted. "Eustace, you are spoiling me horribly with all this

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luxury. It is not fitting for a working woman."

"Well, you know—" The pause was eloquent, and she did not pretend to miss its meaning. Cameron had gone to his room.

"You wouldn't want these outer things to have any influence," she said gravely, putting her hands to the fire.

"Why not? They are all I have to offer to a woman like you, except—well, you know, rather a strong feeling." He, too, had his hands to fire, and he did not look at her. "I should be very glad if anything whatever could make it worth your while. But I don't expect it. I have no illusions about myself."

"You are very true and dear and fine. I wish I could do it, Eustace—I wish I could." There was wavering in her voice, wavering and longing. She was tired of care, tired of working so hard—and Paul had his girl! "Oh, I wish I could!" she repeated on a broken breath. "But that is impossible." It was a frail "impossible," and, knowing this, Charlotte shivered when he broke the long pause that followed with a sudden movement. But he had only thrust a hand into his breast pocket,

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"Should you like to see our mileage record?" he asked, bringing out a small note book.

"No," said Charlotte. "We must get ready for dinner; Cameron will be starved," she added over her shoulder, and shut the door of her room on him.

The hotel was in an accidental corner of good climate to which the rich of less favored spots came all winter for the tonic of ocean and sunned pines. The garish extravagance with which they were fed, served and housed appealed to Charlotte's mood. Eustace, with his unfailing thoughtfulness, left her early, and Cameron stumbled off to bed, half asleep, but she still sat up over her fire, staring into a possible future. The charm of it grew rather than diminished. At last she started up and, going to the desk, wrote a long letter to Paul. It might have been a persuasive letter to herself, all that tempted her was so alluringly set forth. "And changes will come, with Us," she ended on a note of wistfulness. "You will get other and closer interests. I think I would rather break out while it is still perfect than see you drop away, one after another. I couldn't bear it, Paul." That was her only al-

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lusion to his "girl." She might have rung for a boy to mail the letter, but she was too unused to service to think of that until she was half way downstairs. It was after eleven, and the hotel lobby was nearly empty; but a neat, familiar figure stood at the desk, studying a local guide book.

The letter in Charlotte's hand seemed to give a guilty leap. In an impulse of panic she thrust it into her blouse, and would have slipped away again if Eustace had not at that moment looked up. He came to meet her with a perturbed forehead.

"Ah, I hoped you were resting!"

"I am not sleepy," Charlotte explained, truthfully enough. "I—I think I will take a little walk in that long glass porch. It looked rather nice as we came in. The palms are probably made of paper, but never mind!" She realized that she was talking nervously, and ridiculed herself into serenity again as they paced the dimly lit arcade. A few groups still lingered in its green recesses, and Charlotte eyed them thoughtfully as she passed.

"I suppose they aren't really as bored as they look," she admitted. "It is a strange fact, Eustace—the more grandly people are

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dressed, in public places, the less they apparently have to say. Do you suppose clothes end by choking one? Or are they so enjoyable that one doesn't need the pleasures of conversation?"

"I couldn't say, I'm sure," said Eustace. "We consider the American women overdressed, at home. Here is a very good little guide to the region that I have picked up. You may take it to your room with you if you like."

Charlotte ignored the offer. "Tell me about the women you have known best," she said abruptly. "Were any of them like me?"

"Oh, not at all," in startled protest. "There have been so few, anyway. I am not a ladies' man. I used to go botanizing with Lady Mary Selwyn now and again, and I generally write to her if I come on a specimen of any interest. She is remarkably well informed."

Charlotte turned to him impulsively. "Why on earth do you like me?" He flushed under the attack.

"Why, that seems to me very obvious! You are so charming, so clever. And then, you make a shy person like me so at home with

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you. I give you my word, I have never felt so at ease with any one, man or woman, or—or talked so freely, as it were. It is not easy for me to be so intimate.”

“So intimate as you and I are?” she repeated, the gleam of a smile in her eyes.

“Yes. I find myself telling you all sorts of things—like that about writing to Lady Mary, for instance. I should like to show you England.”

A swift memory of wide green English vistas, of ancient parks and lanes deep-walled with holly, and placid, brimming streams, stirred and warmed her. She bent a little towards him.

“I wish you could,” she said, so gently that he straightened excitedly.

“Ah, you would enjoy it,” he exclaimed. “I could really give you some idea of what you were seeing there, where I know my ground.”

Her mood unaccountably chilled. “I suppose you could point out all the objects of interest,” she said slowly.

“I ought to be able. Of course, here I only

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know what I read up over night. That is very little." She halted.

"I must go upstairs," she said. Eustace turned at once.

"Ah, yes, you must rest," he assented. "There is nothing like rest when one is tired. Do take this little book with you; I shan't want it. You will find it interesting, I think."

She took it with a faint smile. "Thank you. Good night," she said. As she passed the mail box, she remembered her letter, and paused, her hand at her blouse; but went on without posting it. "Tomorrow will do as well," she murmured.

The weather had evidently spent its loveliness. Rain was falling the next morning with a gray steadiness that was ominous. They found that they were glad of a day's rest, and settled down contentedly to magazines and letters. Cameron's unfailing presence and deep interest in everything that was said kept the talk impersonal, and Charlotte was not sorry. But her eyes smiled affectionately on Cousin Eustace when he brought her a careful selection of picture postals, showing the local points of interest. He really was a dear.

Rain was still falling with unabated pur-

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pose when they awoke the day following. With revived energies they took to pool and bowling for a happy morning; but the afternoon seemed a little long. Eustace read aloud an article on recent additions to the known flora and fauna of Central Africa, and offered a second article on the political future of China, but Charlotte rebelled.

"I won't have my mind improved any more to-day," she declared. "Come and be comfortable by the fire. What is the good of so much information?"

Eustace was startled. "One has to know things," he protested.

"It is a good deal more important to know each other! Come and get acquainted."

He took an uneasy seat on the edge of a straight chair. "Of course, I will tell you anything you like," he conceded. "But there is very little to know about me."

"I want to know your ideas—on life, on religion, on art and politics and love, on everything you think about." It was a large order, as her smile admitted. Had she pointed a gun at him, he would not have looked half so disturbed.

"Well, I belong to the Established Church,"

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he finally brought out. "Every one does, at home."

"And what about it? What does it mean to you?"

"Oh, I go to church, of course. And pay tithes. And dine the rector. He's a very good sort, our rector;" Eustace breathed relief at this safe aspect of the topic. "He's quite a sharp on entomology. His collection of butterflies is said to be the third best private collection in the Kingdom. I'd like you to see them."

"I'd hate to," was the humorously frank answer. "I don't like collections."

"Ah, but you would be interested in my geological cabinets. You couldn't help it," he exclaimed. "I should enjoy showing them to you."

Charlotte's spirits drooped a little. "I am not very intelligent," she apologized. "I like ideas so much better than facts! Are you fond of the theatre?" she added, a note of fresh hope in her voice.

"I like a good play now and again, if it isn't unpleasant." The plea for ideas had evidently reached him; she saw one formulating, and waited eagerly till he brought it out: "I

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must say, when I go to the theatre, I like to be amused!" And Eustace leaned back, relievedly conscious of having met the requirements.

Cameron, who had been reading by the window, threw down his magazine with a yawn and came to join them.

"I wish old Paul were here," he said.

A quick pain shot through Charlotte's heart.

On the third day it still rained, though less steadily. Eustace took an excursion on foot, and reported the roads in a deplorable state.

"But it is clearing; and a day of high wind would make it all right for us," he reassured them. "This is Friday; oh, we shall get off by Monday, anyway."

"Monday!" Charlotte exclaimed, an involuntary dismay in her voice. "I ought to be home and at work by Monday," she added in explanation. "I expected to be at home Sunday night; I have some people coming."

"If it is important, we can go back by train," said Eustace, looking troubled.

"Oh, no; we don't want to do that," said Charlotte warmly, and fell into a revery,

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staring out at the drenched landscape. Eustace cut the leaves of a new periodical.

"There is an article here I should like to read you," he began. "It is——"

Charlotte interrupted with an irrelevant question: "There is a good deal of rain in Surrey, isn't there?"

"Oh, yes, a good bit. More than you have in this country. I could find you some statistics if you are interested."

"I thought there was," she said wearily, turning away. "Do you know, Eustace, I really think I must go back by train? Those people are coming to supper, and—you know how it is."

He rose at once. "Yes, of course. And you have been so very patient, waiting here all this time. I will find out about the trains."

His voice and aspect were unchanged, yet some instinctive knowledge made Charlotte call him back.

"You have been so good to us," she said, taking his hand. "We shall never forget it, Cameron and I. We are very fond of you, Cousin Eustace."

For a revealing instant his eyes looked

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straight down into hers; then he was his shy, trimly buttoned self again.

"It was so very good of you to come," he said.

They fairly ran up the stairs of home, the next noon, and threw back the door with a welcoming call for the little cook. No one answered. There was dust in the sitting room, disorder in the kitchen, emptiness in the servant's bedroom. Evidently the little cook had passed on. Charlotte sat down on a kitchen chair and roared with laughter.

"Good riddance," she said. "I am glad of it. We will go out for some lunch, dear boy, and get in provisions."

"Don't you wish we had that bully hotel?" exclaimed Cameron.

"No; I feel more like a Child's Dairy." Charlotte's spirits were at high tide. "You and I aren't meant for luxuries," she went on presently as they sat contentedly over a lunch that would have filled Cousin Eustace with horror. "We really like to rough it, to travel light, to be free of ceremony and belongings. There's a touch of the tramp in us, Cameron dear. That hotel began to feel like a county jail, to me. I have moments of

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thinking I like luxury; but it is much more fun to be our kind! I'm going to give the place a glorious cleaning, and we'll have such a good supper tomorrow night, and such good talk! O Cameron dear, never, never get to thinking that the fleshpots are more desirable than brains and wits and imaginations; you will never in your life get anything better than these Sunday nights of ours. Why don't you order rice and milk? It's heavenly good.

"And, you know, even if Paul has a girl, it won't take him away from us. Nothing will; we needn't worry. We all belong to each other for life now. Oh, it will be good to get my hands on that refrigerator! She never kept it properly. People like Cousin Amelia don't know anything about the joy of bodily work. Her sort of life would smother us, Cameron! Think of the eternal decorous routine—the rector to dinner—the improving articles—the British Sunday! Oh, my dear, never get discontented with your lot. We are very blessed, you and I; we have such a dear, gay little life together. I am going to have a big cup of coffee!"

Buying their provisions took on the nature

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of a spree under Charlotte's mood. Home again, she put on a working dress, planned her campaign and gave Cameron a list of commissions to execute.

"You can't help me, and I don't want you about underfoot," she said.

"You'll kill yourself," he prophesied. "I know you."

She had just found among her belongings a sealed letter addressed to Paul, and she tore it across with a quick flush in her cheeks.

"You know me! Much you do," she exclaimed. "You are nothing but a puppy; you don't know anything whatever about grown men and women. I am rather glad you don't," she added with a sigh. "I should hate to have you find out what an old fool your mother has nearly been, once or twice in her life! But you will never, never know, thank heaven. Go on with you, little boy."

Cameron paused in the hall, hat in hand. Then he put his head back through the narrowest possible opening of the door.

"Mother!"

"Well?" unsuspectingly.

"Should I have had to call him papa?"

Then the door banged.

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Cameron wisely did not come back that afternoon, but Donna dropped in towards five o'clock, to find Charlotte, weary but radiant still, putting the last touches to a shinningly clean kitchen. They greeted each other with the enthusiasm of long separation. Charlotte told of the week's adventures so as to make Donna sigh with desire.

"Still, it is perfectly beautiful to be back," Charlotte explained. "I do like my life, Donna—the work and freedom and stimulation. Of course, I know I am fooling myself; that things are really rather cheap and nasty, and that I am simply spinning a sort of glamour over them—pretending. If I were a finer, more honest character, and saw things just as they are——"

The force of Donna's protest took her out of her chair.

"Now, Charlotte McLean," she began, standing indignantly over her; "suppose you were little, and were playing with a radiantly lovely lady doll, dressed in trailing satins, who had three exquisite baby dolls, of varied character and surpassing interest; and suppose some Mamie Snooks came along and said, 'Pshaw! They're only a whisk broom and

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three clothespins dressed in handkerchiefs!"—and suppose the literal facts seemed to bear her out; yet which of you would really have seen deepest and farthest and best?"

"I would," said Charlotte meekly.

"And which would be the blind, stupid one, you who only needed a wooden peg to hang your imaginings on, to see the spirit of things, or Mamie Snooks, who might just as well be a millionaire, because she could never possibly get any good out of anything else?"

"Mamie Snooks;" still more meekly.

"Well, then!" said Donna subsiding.

CHAPTER XIV.

PAUL'S WIFE.

“‘For we’re all frank and twenty
When the spring is in the air,’”

chanted Donna, leaning far out into the morning. Spring had come over night. The city had gone to sleep with cold rain on the windows, but waked to find its streets shining as with golden oil, its trees a green mist, its sober winter spirit burst like a brown chrysalis to let out gauzy wings of joy. Youth walked with an exuberant downward push of heels forbidden their instinctive fling upwards, and on a thousand desks beside Donna’s the work lay forgotten while elbows rested on the sunned window ledges. Far below her crowds were already humming and buzzing about the spring bloom of the shops. She watched them with smiling, understanding eyes.

“‘The spring-fret is on me
And the dry goods call,’”

she murmured, and, from long practical habit,

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paused to wonder if something might not be made of the parody; then threw it away with a laugh. This was no day to be thrifty of stray thoughts. Visions of cool linen, of filmy batiste and tinted Japanese crepe began to form before her; the first rapt conception of a poem could not have held her more intent than her inspiration for making an old lace handkerchief the basis for a handsome new blouse. She had started up to get out materials when her doorbell brought a thrill of possibilities. She threw back the door for Charlotte with a welcoming laugh.

"So you couldn't work, either," she exclaimed. "I am so glad. Was there ever such a day?" Charlotte's glance searched her face, then fell away. She looked pale and constrained as she followed into the sitting room.

"It is nice," she admitted, turning to the windows.

"My spring fever has come," Donna explained, beginning to put her scattered papers out of sight. "It is as regular as people's hay fever—don't you know how that arrives to the minute, on the twenty-first of August at two in the afternoon, for instance? Mine

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comes on the first morning of real spring and lasts for ten days exactly. It's clothes, with me. I can't think of anything else. Charlotte, they make my heart beat! Truly. Do you have it, too?"

"I think I get the perambulator fever, about this time." Charlotte still kept her face turned away. "I can't get past a baby carriage without putting my head in."

"I wonder what fever Paul gets?" Donna went on. "He had been rather crazy, lately, anyway—wasn't he funny, Sunday night? I have never seen him so wildly gay."

"What do you hear from Lorrimer?" abruptly.

"Why, I don't. I have only had a note or two since he left." Donna's voice had become faintly conscious. "I can't believe that work is keeping him there two months; I think it must be the charms of Washington. Do you know if Lanse has had any more news?" she added, as Charlotte did not speak.

"Oh, yes. Harrison liked the play enormously, and wants to see his next. He almost took it." Charlotte spoke absently, then turned away from the window with a deep breath of resolution. "Donna, I had a visit

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from Paul last night. He said he had written you. You didn't get the letter?"

"No," with quick apprehension.

"I thought it would have come. Donna dear, he is going to be married." She leaned her forehead against the casement and waited till the other moved. When at last Donna lifted her head, their eyes met in a long look.

"He would never have cared that way for either of us," said Donna quietly.

"No. I always knew it. That was what saved me from—I wondered if you knew it."

"Yes—dimly. I didn't think much. It was marvellous enough to get what I did get. That is what it has meant, of course—his wild spirits."

"Yes. I suspected—he was out of town so much. She must be glorious, by what he says. Do you want to hear about her?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, Paul says he saw her come into a room, and his first thought was, 'Straight from Olympus!' She was big and serene and very beautiful. Then some one introduced them, and his next thought was, '*Simple comme bonjour!*' She was as simple and straight and open as some lovely creature who had never

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known man. It was fairly massive, her simplicity, yet there was a sort of sweet-lipped gaiety—that's what he called it—that brought her very humanly close. He says his third conscious thought was, 'I am going to marry you;' and that it has never left his mind for one instant, day or night, since. She is very poor; her father is a broken down old scholar, and they live in a broken down old house full of rare books."

Donna had listened dejectedly. "Does she do things?" she asked.

"Sings; and is a wonderful housewife. Her mother was a well known German singer, and brought her up on the ancestral plan. There is a least touch of foreignness in her voice, Paul says; and she has big, lovely white hands, like a goddess—she is ample, and maternal, and heavenly sweet. Really good enough, I honestly believe!"

"It is possible," Donna admitted heavily. "With all his craziness, Paul was so wise."

Charlotte shivered, then laughed protestingly. "We musn't take the past tense about him," she explained. "He isn't dead, Donna. He is our Paul still."

"H'm!" It was a cynical assent. Charlotte

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started to argue the point, then, forgetting to finish, came and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"It isn't going to be so very bad, is it?" she asked. Donna smiled.

"Oh, I'm all right! It has cured my spring fever, that's all. One is like a person who never even dreamed he should go to heaven, anyway," she went on with quaint frankness. "One isn't disappointed. And yet, of course, if ever, by a miracle, the golden gates had been swung open in one's face—well, one isn't a fool!"

"One certainly isn't," said Charlotte, kissing her. "Don't you want to come out and do something?"

"No; I will wait for Paul's letter. It will probably come on the second delivery." They walked slowly together to the door, loath to separate. As they opened it, a boy confronted them with a telegram. Donna read it, then handed it without comment to Charlotte.

"Coming home tomorrow. L. F."

Charlotte returned it in silence and rang for the elevator. When it arrived, she looked back with the gleam of a smile in her eyes.

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"Evidently Lorrimer has heard the news," she observed, then disappeared into the car.

Donna's answer to Paul's letter—sent him by messenger—was so inspired, so genuine in its warmth, so gay and kind, and touched with so fine a thrill, that Paul dropped his work and ran to her in a spring tumult of feelings. The exaltation of her writing mood was still on her; they met up in high, bright regions where friendship was golden romance, and joy in another's joy was a full feast. Paul walked excitedly about the room and she watched him from her corner with lighted eyes and flushed cheeks.

"Donna, you don't know! To have found the perfect thing, to get marriage without one little inch of compromise, of glossing over or pretending—! We are not the kind to go blind in love, my dear; we see—oh, horribly! We may pretend we are fooled, to oblige our senses, but we never are, we never are! Heavens—I have been so in love, several times, that I was bodily sick, ready to die for the lady of the moment, and all the time my mind sat up there and said, 'Really, you know, she's a commonplace little dub; you are just pretending to find value in her because you like the

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line of her chin or the nape of her silly neck.' And it was true! I suppose that is what has saved me, kept me till I found Lucia. We are wise, Donna; that is what makes us Us, I think—with all our folly, we're wise at life. Why, take you—you're one of the wisest persons I have ever known! Young and impulsive and quick blooded, full of talent and all that that means, but fundamentally, soundly wise. It's like a thoroughbred horse, who goes mad at a bit of paper, but is steady in a bad place. At least, they say he is!

"Charlotte is wise, too. Ah, she was so wonderful, Donna, when I went to tell her! It was terribly hard to tell you all—did you know that? I felt that, till you knew Lucia, you would think that it meant losing me—just as, if you or Charlotte had married, I should have gone blue for weeks. I couldn't lead up to it. I said, 'Charlotte, I have found her.' And she said, 'O Paul, how beautiful!' And then we fell on each other's necks. I think we both cried!

"My dear, you mustn't think, even in your secret heart, 'Here is an end to Paul.' It is the beginning of Paul! Loving like this doesn't weaken other affections—it quickens

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and deepens them. And when you know Lucia—! Here I am rattling on like a lunatic. What years of good talk we have had! They say that the glory goes off talk, in time; that after ten years or so of passionate conversation, you settle some things and give up others and get lazy at discussion; but I don't believe that will be true of Us. I can see us all rising up in our grave clothes if an enticing topic were thrown over the churchyard wall!

"Donna, you are really glad, aren't you?"

"Oh, so glad, Paul!"

"And it isn't going to make any difference?"

Her true, unafraid eyes looked straight into his.

"It will make differences. But no difference in what I feel for you! Oh, not one atom!"

"Ah, then it will all come right." He took both her hands and kissed her. "Bless you, Donna."

"Give my love to Lucia," she said.

The door closed upon him, and, for the first time since the news had come, Donna was free to turn to herself. She knew that, when the excitement sank, the hurt would be uncovered, if hurt there was, and she waited

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passively, dreading the sudden drop to personal grieving, the dull gray clouding of her sky, still so clear and luminous. Sooner or later she must suffer, and she would not try to stave it off with distractions. Her cheeks cooled, but the exaltation, instead of dying down, seemed to be taking on the aspect of something serene and lasting; she looked out over all their lives as from a high window of the soul, and saw that they were good. Their friendships still lived, untarnished in their romance. Through all change, these would still mean glorious meetings, richness of experience.

"I shall marry, too," she thought with a leap of pulses. A curious freedom came with loss. She had discovered it after Lorri-mer's departure for Washington, when she realized for the first time how she daily stayed in or hurried home, not to miss his visits. Some such unrecognized constraint had kept her thoughts away from marriage so long as Paul was free. Now the need of love, unchecked, rose up like great, unfolding wings.

"I shall marry, too," she repeated, for the joy of the echo in her blood. Then she shivered. "Oh, but it will hurt tomorrow!"

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Donna came reluctantly back into the world the next morning after a very few hours of sleep. The great disaster had happened; and today it must be faced in cold blood.

"Paul is going to be married," she said aloud, slowly and distinctly, and waited to be overwhelmed. A moment later she caught herself admiring the colors of a broken beam of light that fell across her white counterpane and wondering what train Lorrimer would take. "I don't realize it yet," she decided. "One is numb, at first." She felt a gentle melancholy, an elderly detachment from the joyous fret of spring, as well as a great bodily weariness; her muscles ached as though she had been climbing a mountain; but a determined visualizing of the beloved Lucia, straight from Olympus and heavenly sweet, brought eager hope rather than the expected stab. It seemed almost as if they were going to gain and love her, too, instead of losing Paul. A great stone had crashed into happy waters, but already the waters had begun to accept its presence and settle round it. The stone would always be there, but to future years it might appear an added beauty rather than a catastrophe.

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"I could adjust to anything," she thought with a touch of self-scorn. Then she remembered that she had a time table showing Washington trains, and jumped up to find it.

A sad hearted pilgrimage after a spring suit seemed the best way to get rid of the morning, for, though the fever had gone, one still had to be clothed, and the new-born spring was again twittering of dress—of cool, distinguished grey woollens, and cordial tans, and the ever satisfactory blue serge. Donna hurried over her dressing; if one were going to shop at all, it might as well be early, before the crowds started. She took her check book with her as well as a full purse, feeling a dim right to any comfort that recklessness might bring.

Once started, she bought lavishly, and finally hurried home with an armful of finery to be put on at once, as part of the comforting process. The last button was scarcely adjusted when Floyd came.

He had hurried straight up from the train, touchingly distressed and cindery and oblivious of self; and his compassion reminded her so acutely of her unhappiness that she became pale and grave before it, and gave him a pas-

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sive hand, most unlike her usual active clasp.

"May I come in, Donna? Or would you rather I went away?" he began, without spoken greeting.

"I would rather you came in, Lorrimer," she said; and then the echo of her own sad voice smote sharply on her native honesty. She had been humming ten minutes before, and she knew it. "It's awfully good to see you," she added with a laugh and a brisk change of tone, curling up into her accustomed corner of the couch. "Sit down and tell me things." Floyd, instead of drawing up the leather chair that was called "his," stood unhappily before her.

"Don't bluff with me, please!" he begged. "I can't help knowing—can I?—just what you are going through. I wanted to come the minute I got Paul's letter, but I had to finish up there. I want to help you, Donna. Good God, don't I know all about it!"

His vehemence brought a flush to her cheeks. Her eyes could not meet his. She had not seen Lorrimer since the day that betrayed his secret, and the knowledge of it had been persistently—even angrily—thrust from her consciousness.

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"I am not bluffing," she said, showing unwonted difficulty in finding the right words. "I—I thought it was going to be—just what you expected. Well, then, a broken heart! But, if it is—if it is—Well, you know, Lorri-mer, this isn't the way I should make a heroine feel, under the circumstances!"

It was a Donna-ish speech, and Ffloyd unexpectedly found himself smiling. "How would you show her?" he asked.

"Rolling on the floor! Oh, gasping. Inarticulate cries. 'God, *God!*' Running things into her flesh for the relief of the bodily pain. Oh, I know all about that," she ended, so complacently that Ffloyd laughed as he had not in two months.

"O Donnie, it is good to get you back," he exclaimed. "And you are not doing any of those things?"

She hesitated, then it came with a rush: "Lorrimer, I am buying clothes and—and liking 'em!" Her upturned face was so humorously ashamed, so reluctantly honest, that he bent impulsively towards it; then swung away and drew up the leather chair with a mighty push.

"I don't understand it one bit," he pro-

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tested; but he looked like one from whom a huge burden had been lifted.

"Well, I didn't myself, at first," she admitted slowly. "But I think it is sort of this way: the hero, the prince, rides down the street, and the populace runs along and cheers and is ready to follow him or die for him or anything: he is their hero, their beloved, if you like; but they don't expect things for themselves from him. Does that make any sense? I'm the peasant girl in the crowd, you see: I can love him, and shout for him, and yet go happily about my churning after he has ridden on. I can even shout for his princess! Do you understand?"

His face saddened. "What if the prince had had sense enough to discover you among the peasants?" he asked.

"Oh, well, they don't, as a rule," was the practical answer. "They want the blood royal—and the touch of mystery, Lorrimer! We who analyze ourselves and know all about our processes—we haven't that final charm."

"I don't see it," said Lorrimer shortly.

"It is true. And you see, my—churning has kept me so busy! I don't believe that

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hearts get into much unnecessary trouble when one has to work as hard as I do."

"Oh, don't they!" he returned with a bitter significance that brought the color back to her face. She turned hastily from the topic.

"Tell me what you were doing in Washington," she commanded.

"When Paul's note came, I was in the act of writing you a long letter." She glanced at him uneasily, but made no comment. "I came across a man there that I used to know and like. Talented fellow—a portrait painter. He is going to Paris for two years, and I have agreed to go with him."

Donna had grown very grave. "I don't like it at all!" she said after a long pause.

"Well, it seemed—about the only thing to do." Floyd's voice was drily precise. "We took passage for the twenty-third."

"Of this month?"

"Yes."

"Lorrimer!" It was a frank wail. "Oh, everything is changing and getting hateful! I don't like it!"

"It is part of growing up, isn't it?"

"Then I won't grow up!"

"Well, if anyone could manage not to, it

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would be you," he admitted. "Will you write to me, Donna?"

"No, I won't."

He laughed. "I might as well own up. When I got Paul's note, my dear"—he was watching her with a daring light in his eyes—"I decided that I could not get away from America till autumn, anyway; perhaps not till spring. So I let another man have my berth, and—here I am."

Donna returned the look with unfaltering serenity. "Of course you would want to wait and know Mrs. Paul," she explained. "I don't believe she will take Paul away from us, Lorrimer: she sounds very lovely. I think we are all going to adore her."

"And she isn't going to make any difference to you?" he persisted, wondering.

"Yes, there will be a difference," she admitted. "There has been a breathlessness—a sense of dew and frost and shiny cobwebs. But that couldn't last forever." She drew a deep breath that meant freedom and expanding life. "I think this may mean that the morning is over; but, O Lorrimer, it is going to be a wonderful afternoon!"

THE END.

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